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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY

MARCO PETERKA

ARTIA

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JINDŘICH MARCO — MIROSLAV PETERKA

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY

He who has traversed the earth—felt the tremendous surge of the ocean, scaled ice-bound peaks that reach for the stars, and known the lotus lure of the islands of eternal spring—at his journey's end turns his steps gladly homeward. The farther afield he has roamed and the richer the pattern of his experience, the more heartfelt is his joy at his homecoming.

He wanders through murmuring forests and quiet glades fragrant with wild strawberries. Rocky heights cleave the skyline above him and ravines plunge away at his feet. He clambers by rushing silvery streams and strolls along the banks of leisurely meandering rivers. He watches the play of sunbeams in the gleaming mirror of the lakes. He listens to the sweet sobbing of the ripples and the crystal thunder of the weirs; the soft air that fans his cheek is laden with birds' song and the sibilant whispering of the reeds.

Wherever he goes the past goes with him. It is indelibly inscribed in architectural forms—castles and mansions on proud promontories and cathedrals rising from the dreamy plains into the blue dome of the skies; the towns and villages, even nature itself, are living records of the lives and endeavours of his ancestors. He is constantly aware of the contradistinction between ancient and modern—the villages which cling to the centuries old traditions of folk art and yet are caught up in the inexorable whirl of contemporary life; and the towns in which the past, petrified in indestructible memorials, joins hands with the present, exemplified in the work and pleasure seeking of modern man.

This book presents the impressions made on the wayfarer by his native land—Czechoslovakia. It does not aim at completeness, but rather at a selective canvas capturing atmosphere and conveying the distinctive quality which renders things and people unreplicable in time and space.

ARTIA

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY



A

Picture

Book

of

Czechoslovakia

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY

J. MARCO - M. PETERKA

Artia

Prague

THE FACE OF A COUNTRY

Photographs by Jindřich Marco and Miroslav Peterka

Text by Kamil Bednář

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BEHOLD, MY COUNTRY!

EVERY epoch has its allotted time and intuitively the hour that chimes for it, as Charles Baudelaire wrote in his poems in prose. Not the hour ticked out by the revolving cog-wheels, but the pulsating hour of our lives, which strikes a different note for us than for the author of *Les fleurs du mal*. Those in our age upon whose ear it falls will name it the hour of universal understanding.

Are not these words too grandiose for the introduction to a book of photographs? I think not; these pictures present scenes and people distinct in their individuality and yet in essence having their counterparts all over the world. The intent and purpose of this volume is not to prove that the nations are divided by insurmountable barriers arising out of traditions, race, climate and way of life, but, on the contrary, to show that, because of their fundamental affinity, the nations can comprehend and understand each other. Its further aim is to demonstrate that the beauty inherent in a country and its people becomes apparent when seen through eyes attuned to aesthetic appreciation.

Our book is not intended as an exhibition of chauvinistic pride, attributing to one's own country and nation unrivalled virtues. A national character is of course the pre-condition of all human character: if a man be not nation-minded he cannot become world-minded. The invisible threads which tie him to his birthplace can never be severed. These sentiments, however, are a far cry from chauvinism. Our book is addressed to the reader everywhere and is couched in a new, or rather a timeless language—a universal tongue composed not of complicated alphabets and differing combinations of letters, but of the faculty of the eye to perceive beauty, the capacity of the heart to rejoice at the sight of beauty, and the ability of the mind to serve beauty.

Strangely enough, people seldom realise when they say Turkey, England, Norway or Egypt, that they are expressing a constant, the one and indivisible earth; the variant lies in the sen-

timents of the inhabitants. Therefore, when I say *Behold my country!* that is tantamount to saying *Behold the earth! or the world and all its peoples.*

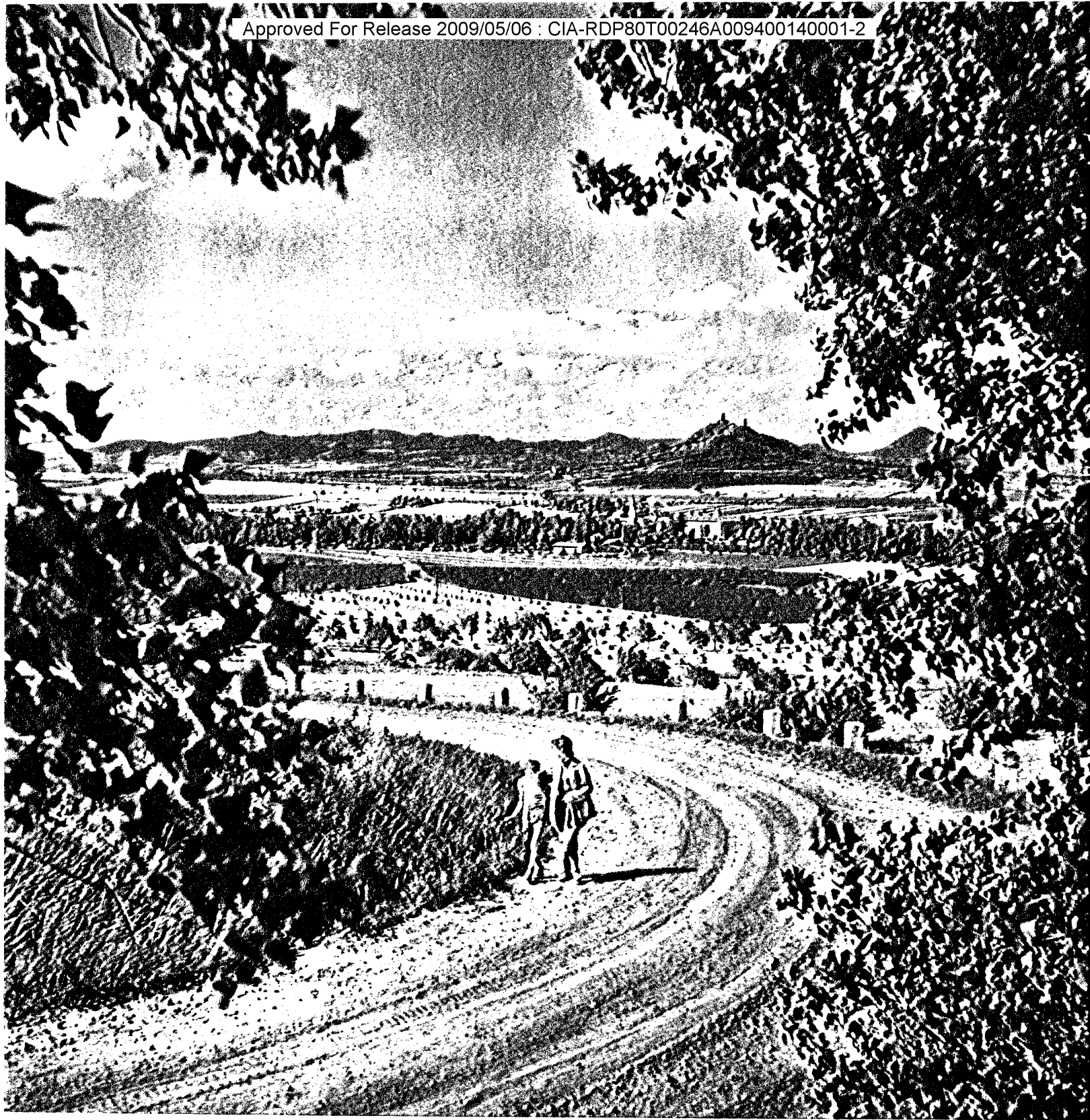
Scenery is one of the innumerable facets that go to make a country. Better expressed, it is not a facet but a language. We have but to gaze and to listen and in the stillness we can distinguish the individual words or at least the gist of its message. There are two kinds of scenery: the original, untamed face of nature which was here before man and will persist after him; and the second, which man has indelibly stamped with his likeness or, if you like, taught his own language: but in fact it is one entity, in which the face of man has merged imperceptibly with the face of nature, and it speaks at one and the same time the language of man and the language of nature.

One of the most beautiful parts of Czechoslovakia is South Bohemia. It is a dreamy, contemplative countryside, a landscape of straight lines stretching to the horizon undisturbed by hill or valley and broken only by the glinting expanses of the meres—bright eyes reflecting white clouds by day and the stars at night. It is a serious, thoughtful country and it has produced serious, thoughtful people. They like to probe to the root of things and this carries them to extremes: to martyrdom for the sake of truth, typified by the fifteenth century religious reformer, Master John Huss, who was burned at the stake, and, at the other end of the scale, to scepticism and sobriety.

Although it has its mountains, too (the Giant Mountains in Bohemia and the Tatras in Slovakia being the highest), Czechoslovakia is not a country of sharp and striking contrasts—neither yawning abysses, nor soaring peaks, neither a wilderness, nor a tropical paradise, but the soothing charm of undulating plains and gently rising hills, threaded with silver-ribboned rivers and streams. The absence of abrupt transitions in their environment has its reflection in the character of the people. It is a country of moderates typified in the folk proverbs, “The golden mean is best” and “The world is good, home is best”.

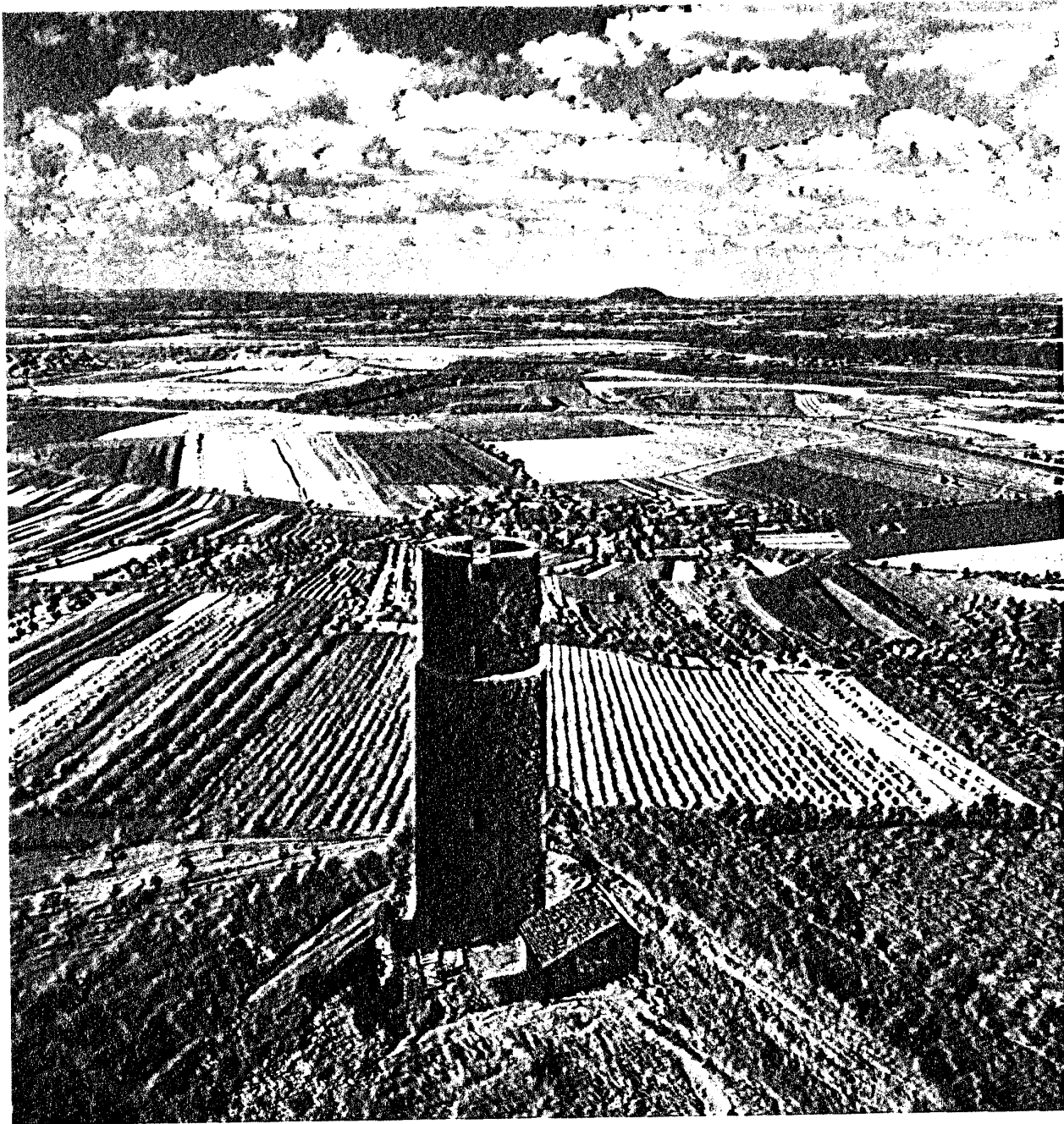
Behold, my country! These words would hold no magic, did they not at the same time imply *Behold, here is beauty!* A book would be bereft of meaning were it to introduce to the world a country and a nation devoid of beauty. Ugliness, even commonplaceness, divides; beauty, like an electric spark, establishes contact. These pages will open up to the reader vistas of beauty which will seem to him new and exciting, though in reality it is the same beauty that roves the universe, seen here in a different guise and discovered by the perceptive eye of the photographer.

The reader, taking this book into his hands, will perhaps open it at the photograph captioned “Autumn, the producer, seeks his Romeo and Juliet” and will exclaim, “Why, that could quite easily have been taken here!” There will be a certain amount of truth in this, but not the whole truth. In the rustle of the falling leaves, in the veil-like tracery of the branches, in the whole tone of the picture, there is a quality which is indefinably and inimitably Czech. It is beauty in essence and form akin to the beauty of other countries, but seen through Czech eyes. Incidentally, there are pictures in this book, known as “typical”, but it should be stressed that the trait for which they are thus designated is intrinsic and is diffused in the atmosphere of the whole book. It is a Czech greeting to readers the world over.

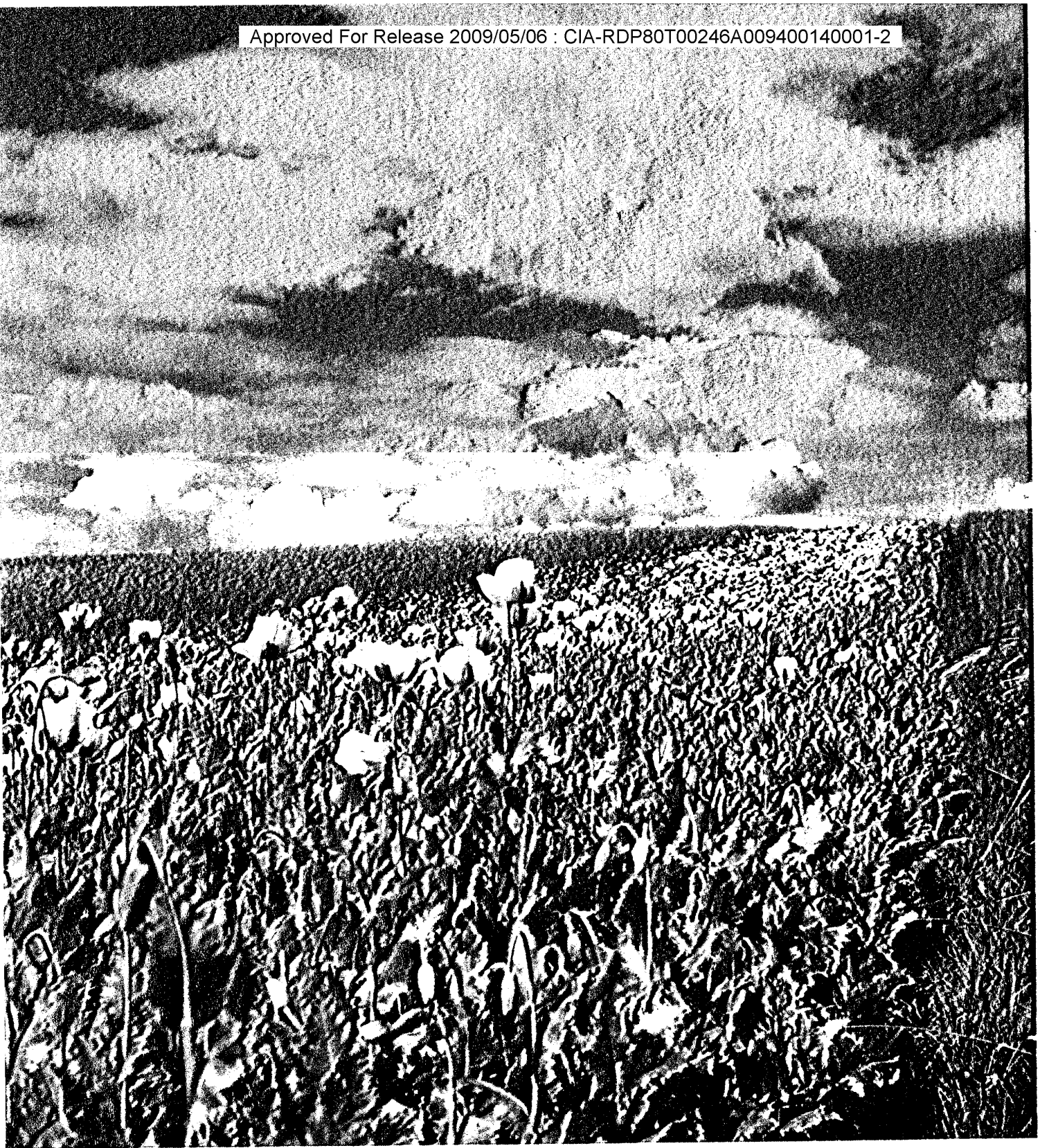


Our wanderings begin





...and history spins its web

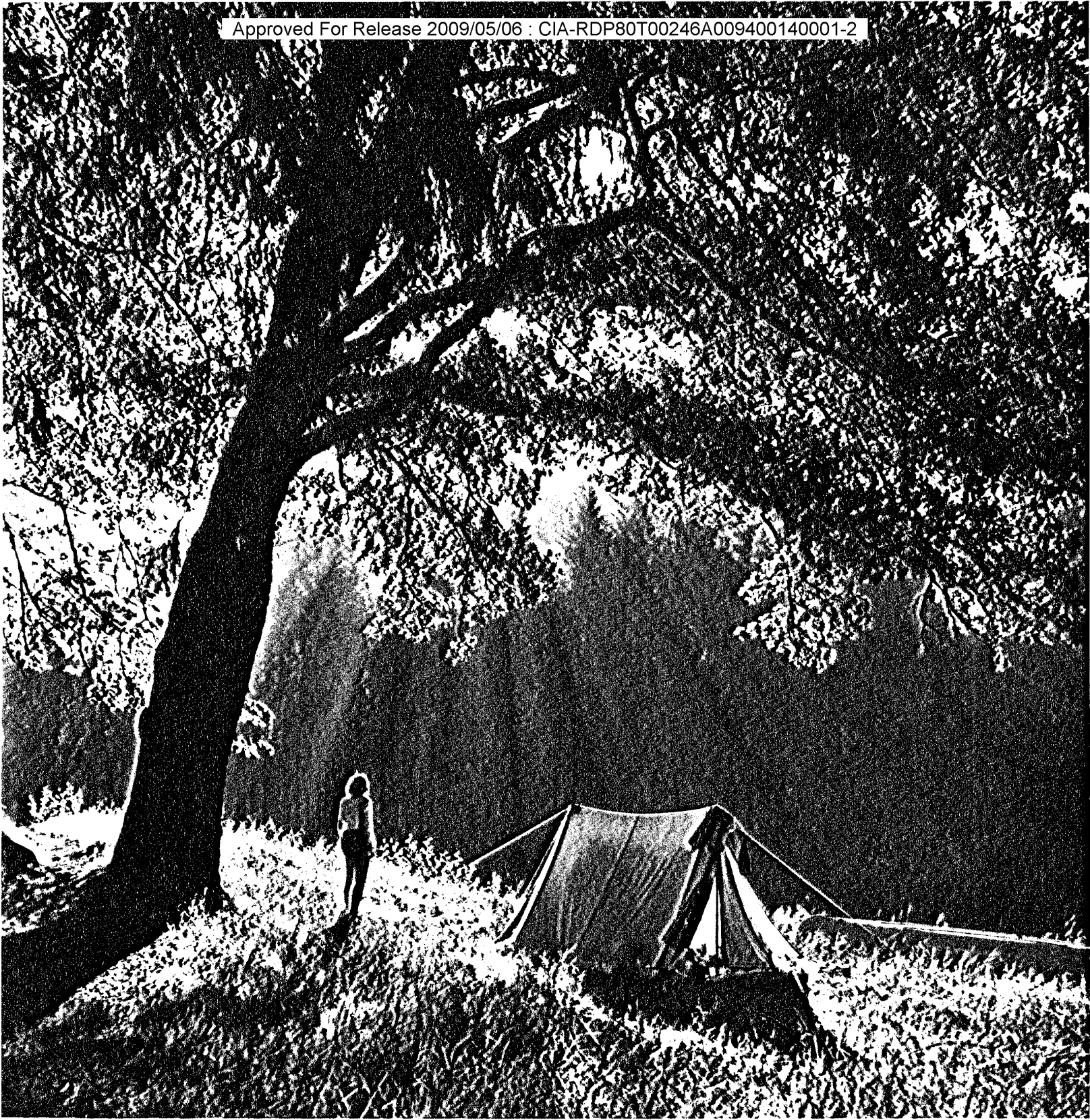


Dancing poppies

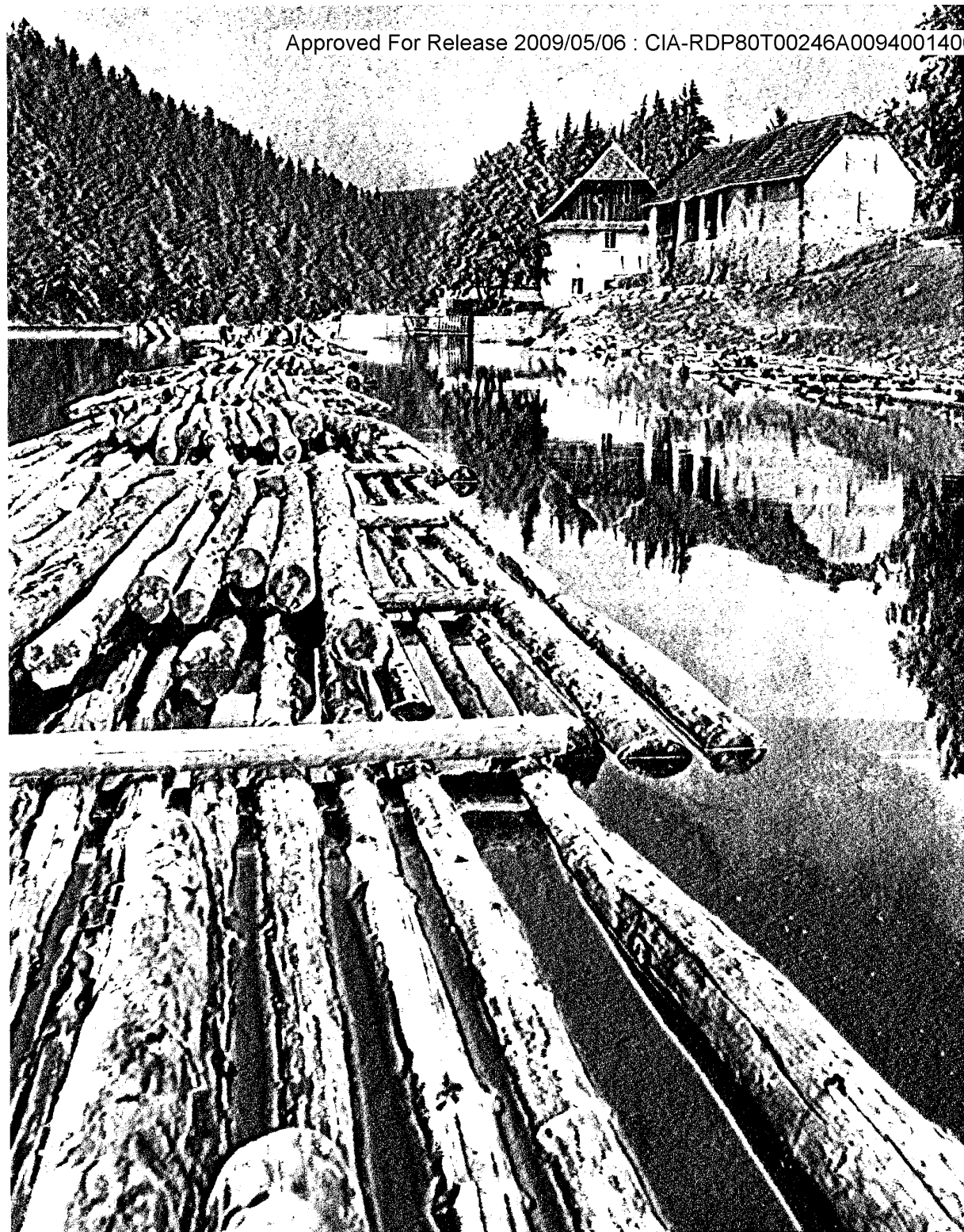


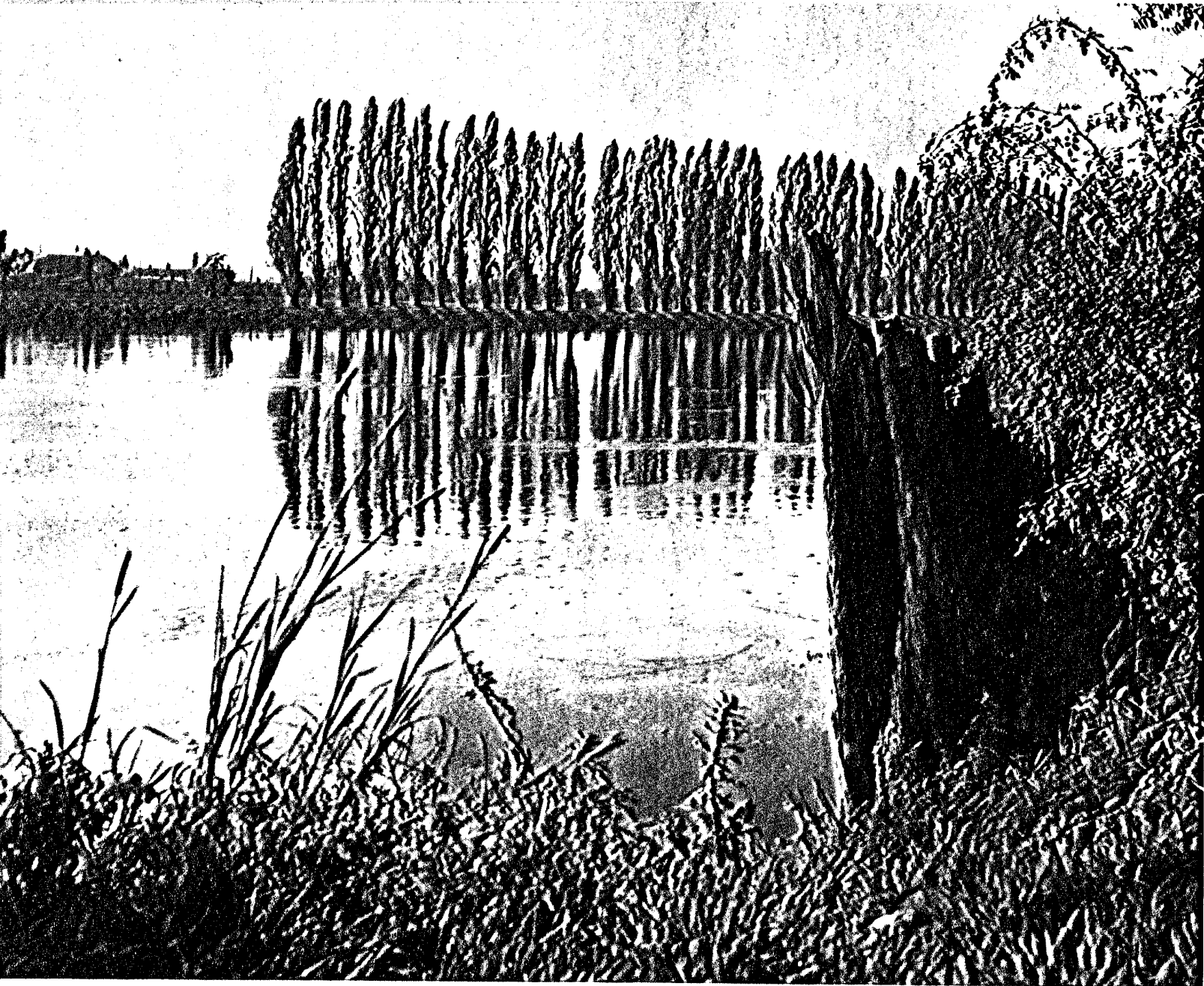
Whispering clouds



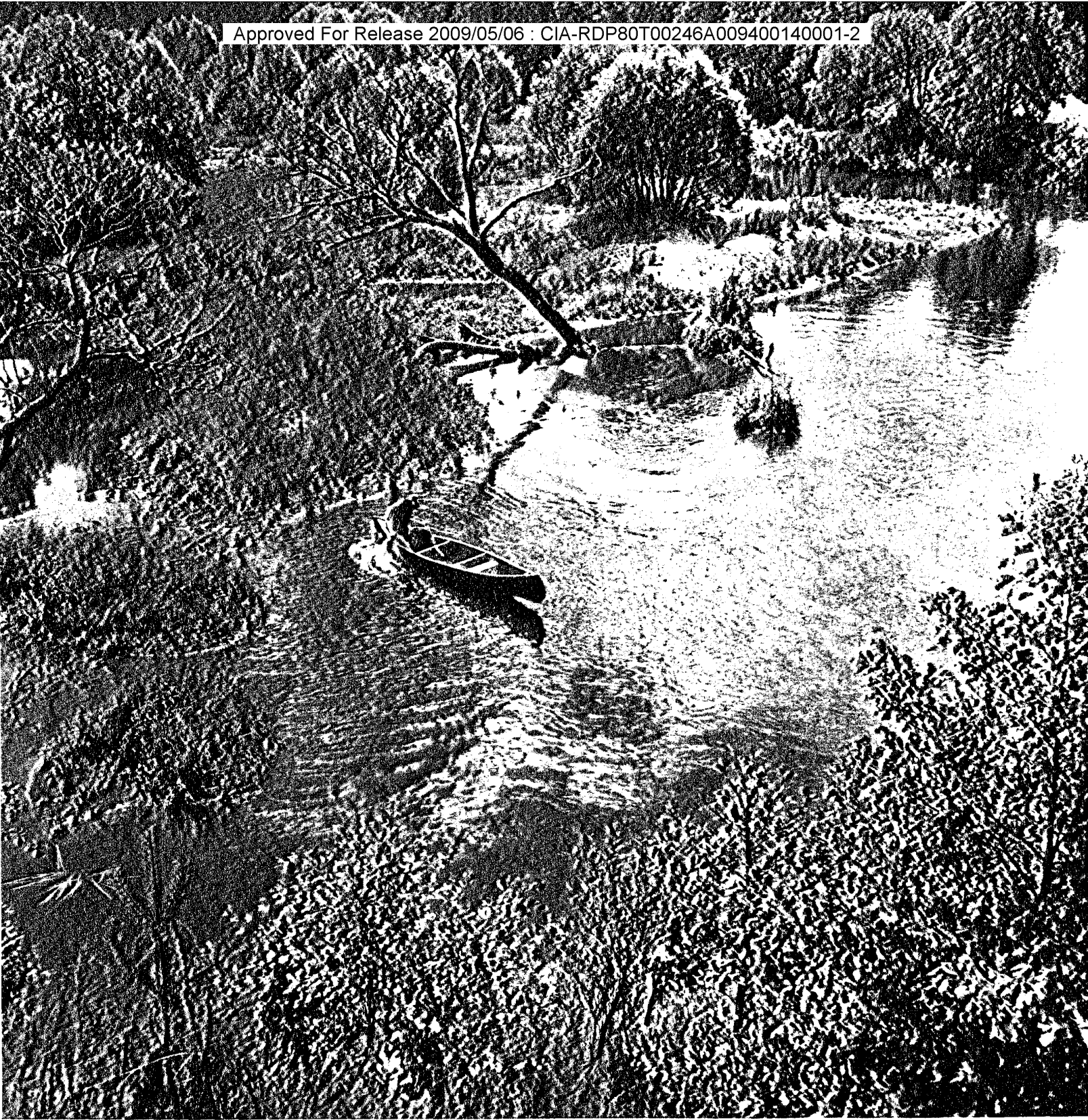


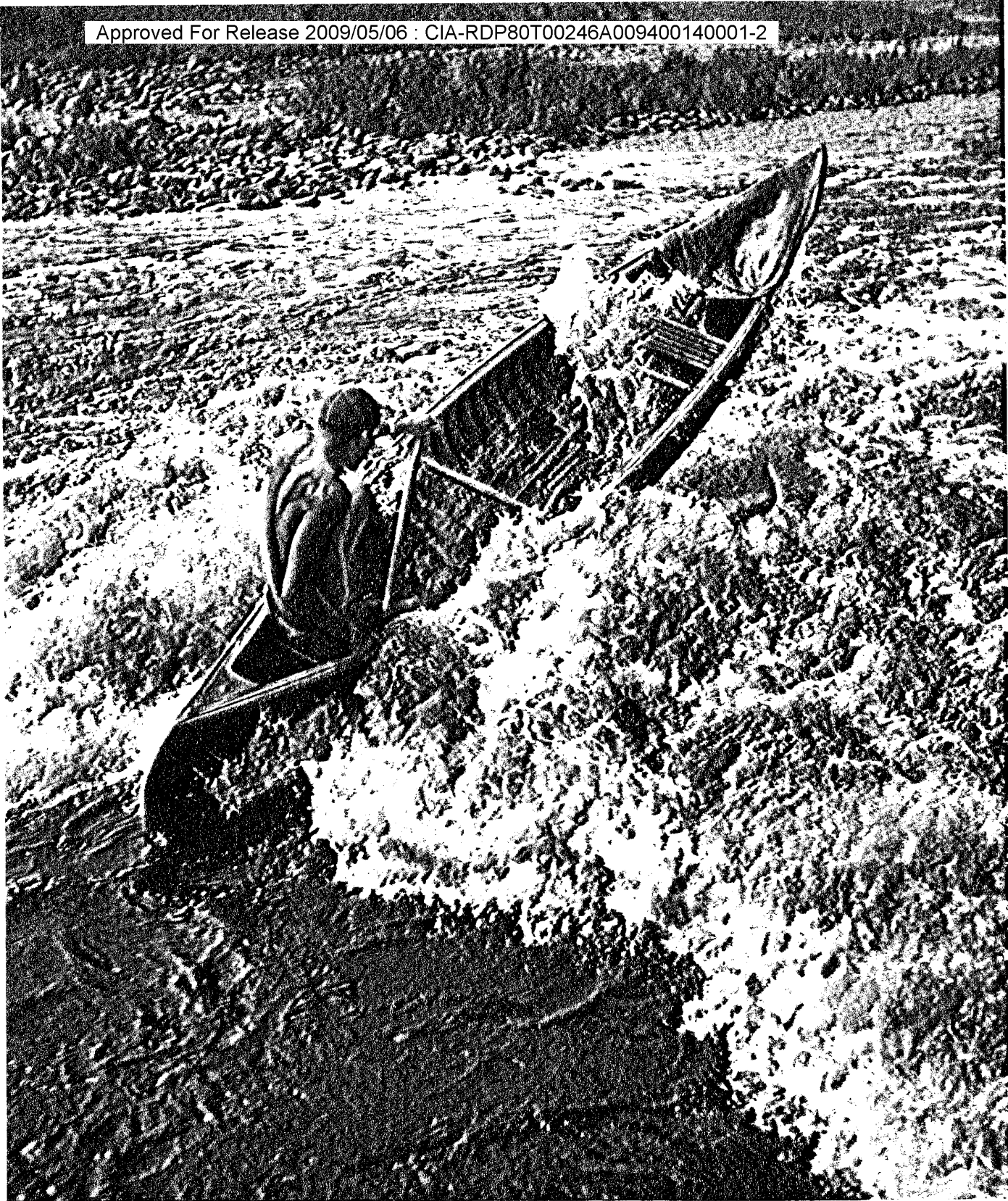
The rising present





Silent sentinels



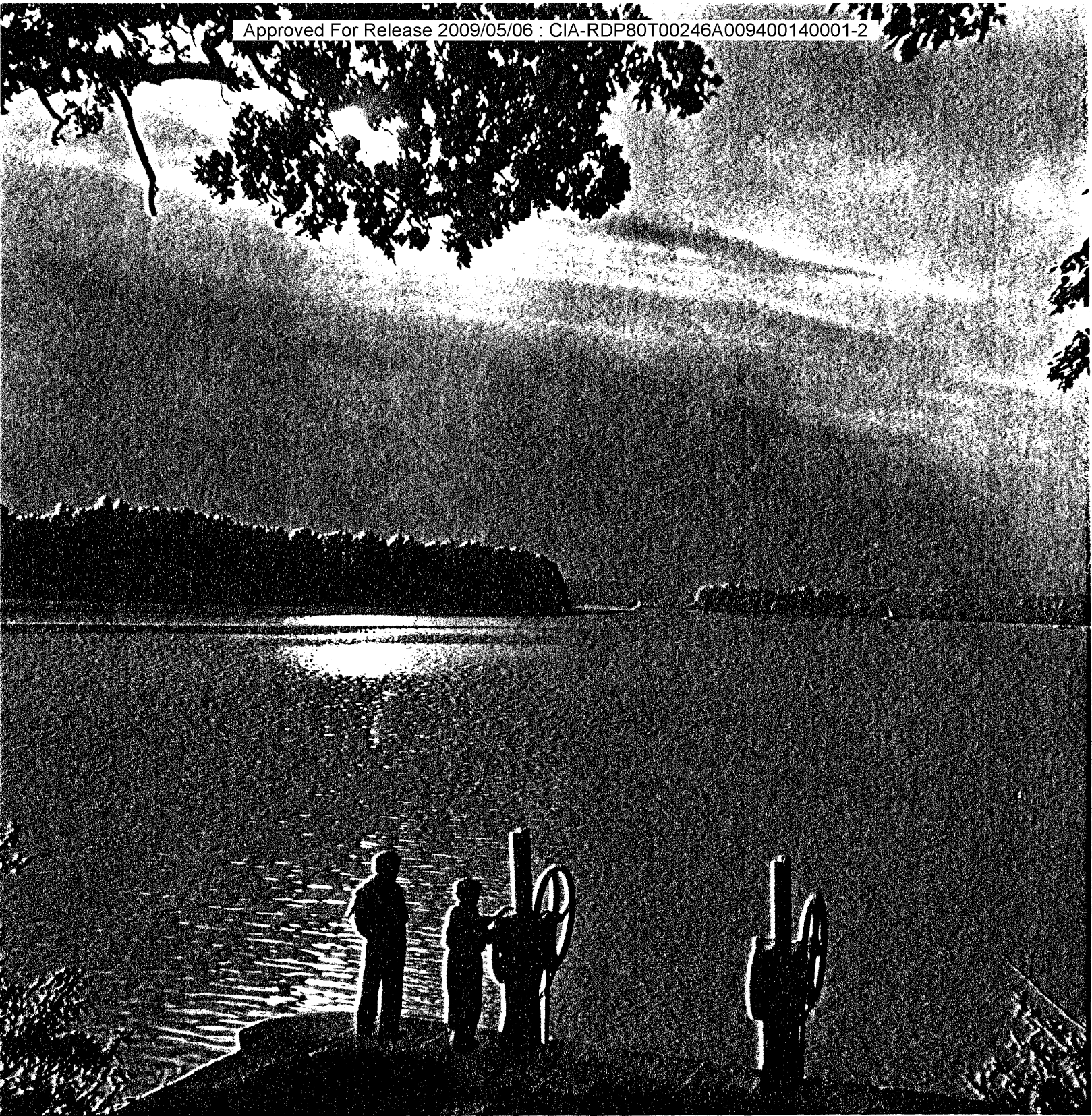


A test of skill





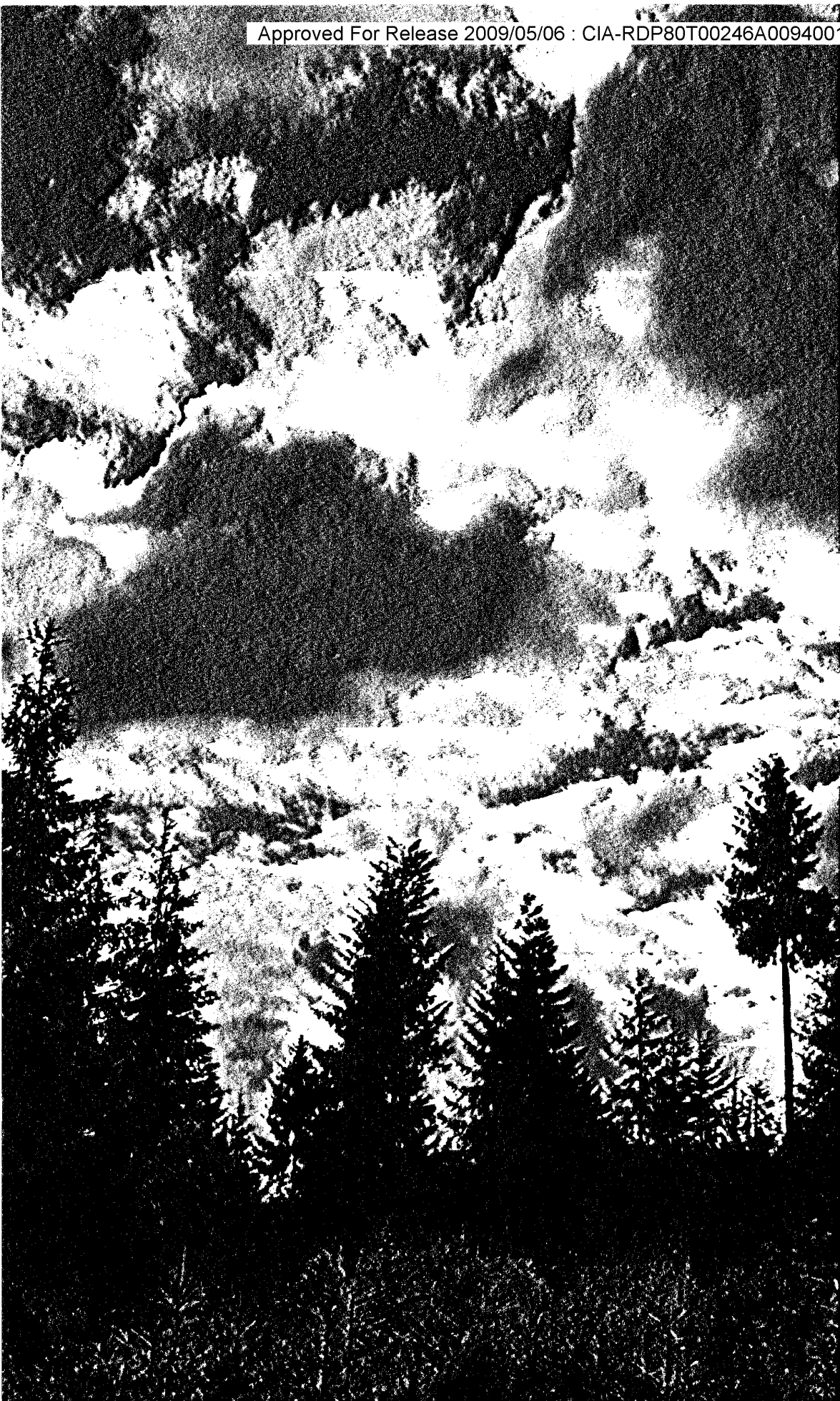
...and Silver



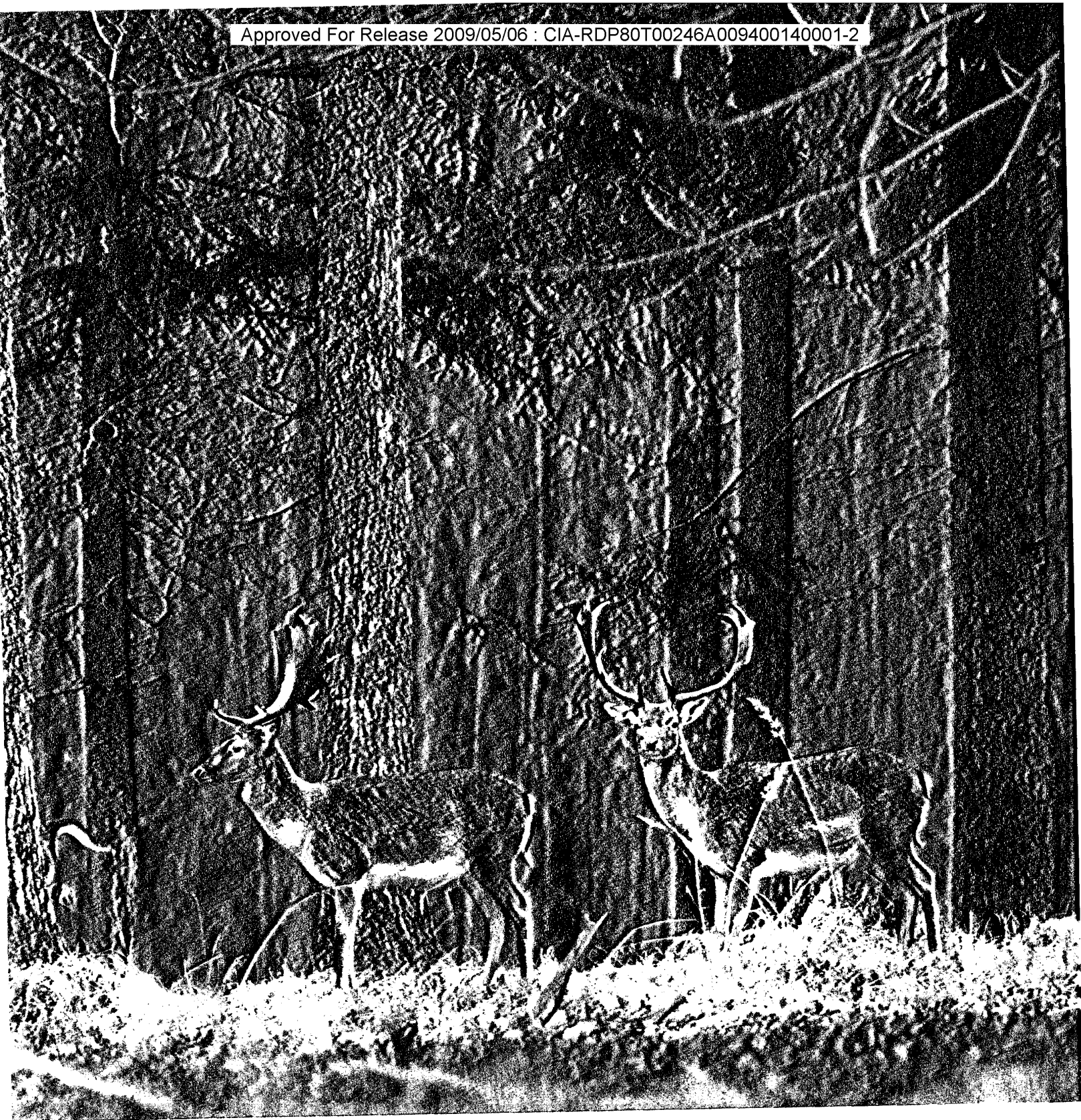
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Stern outlines



Faery forms



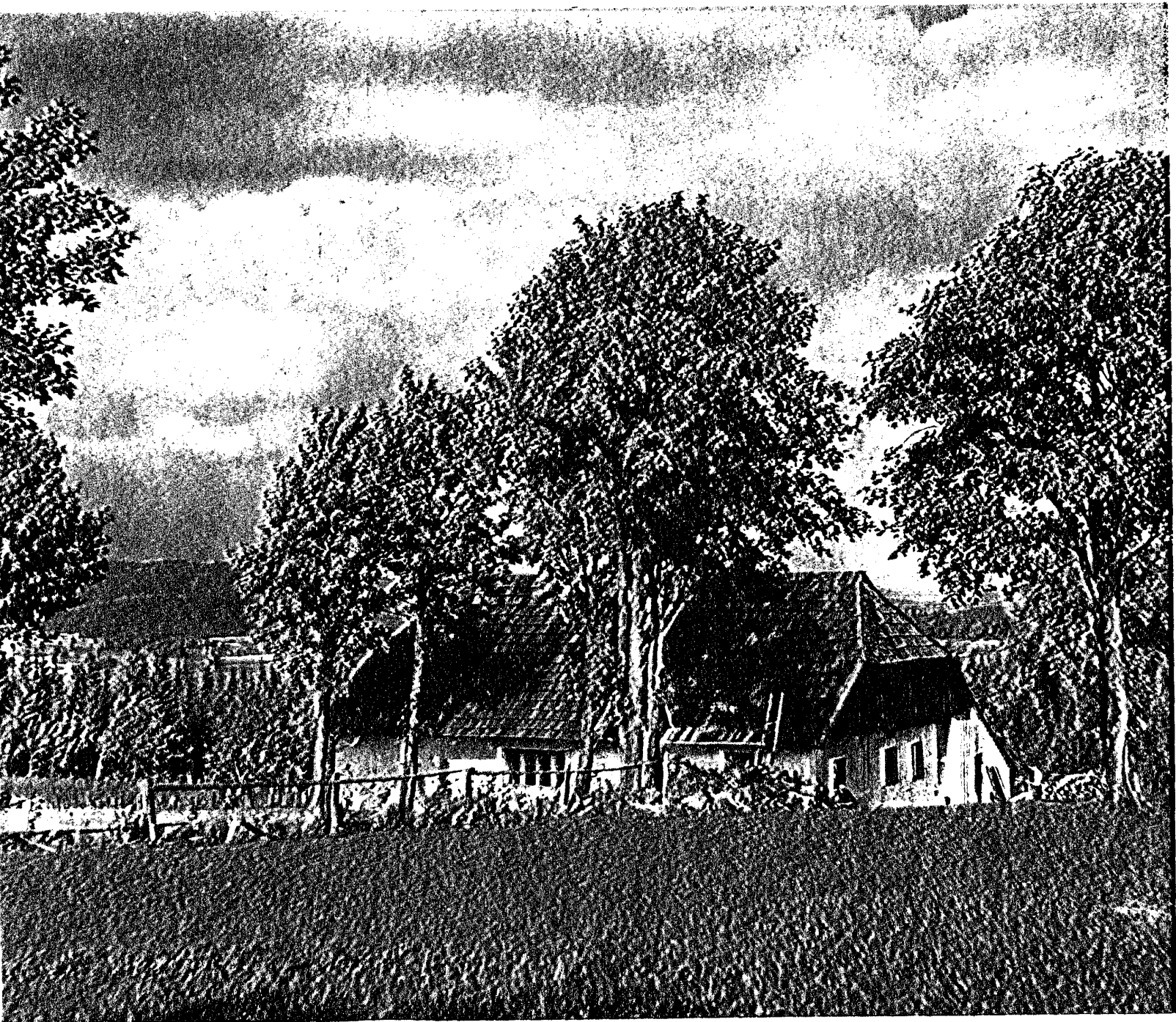


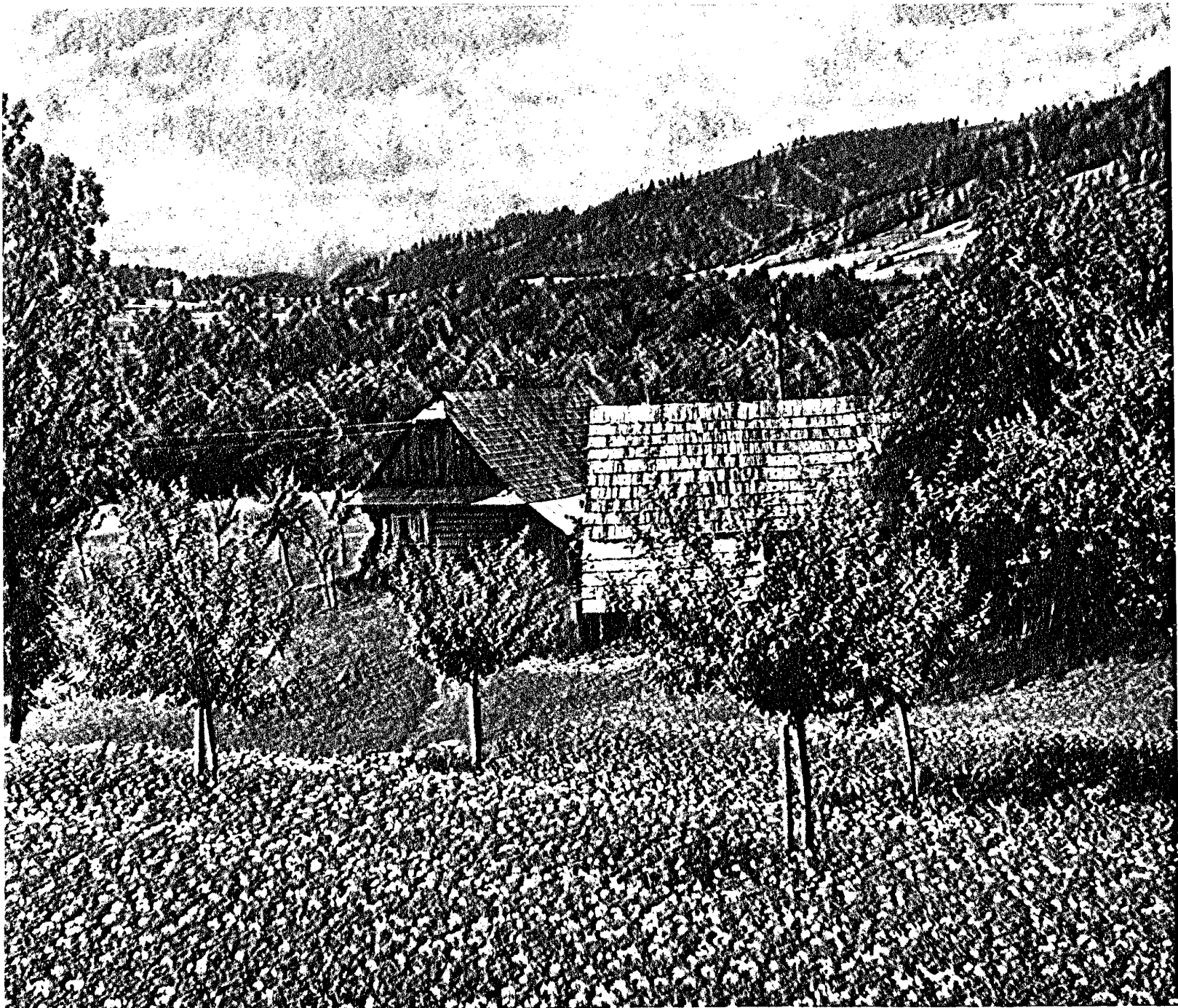
Winter's challenge





Cheery presence

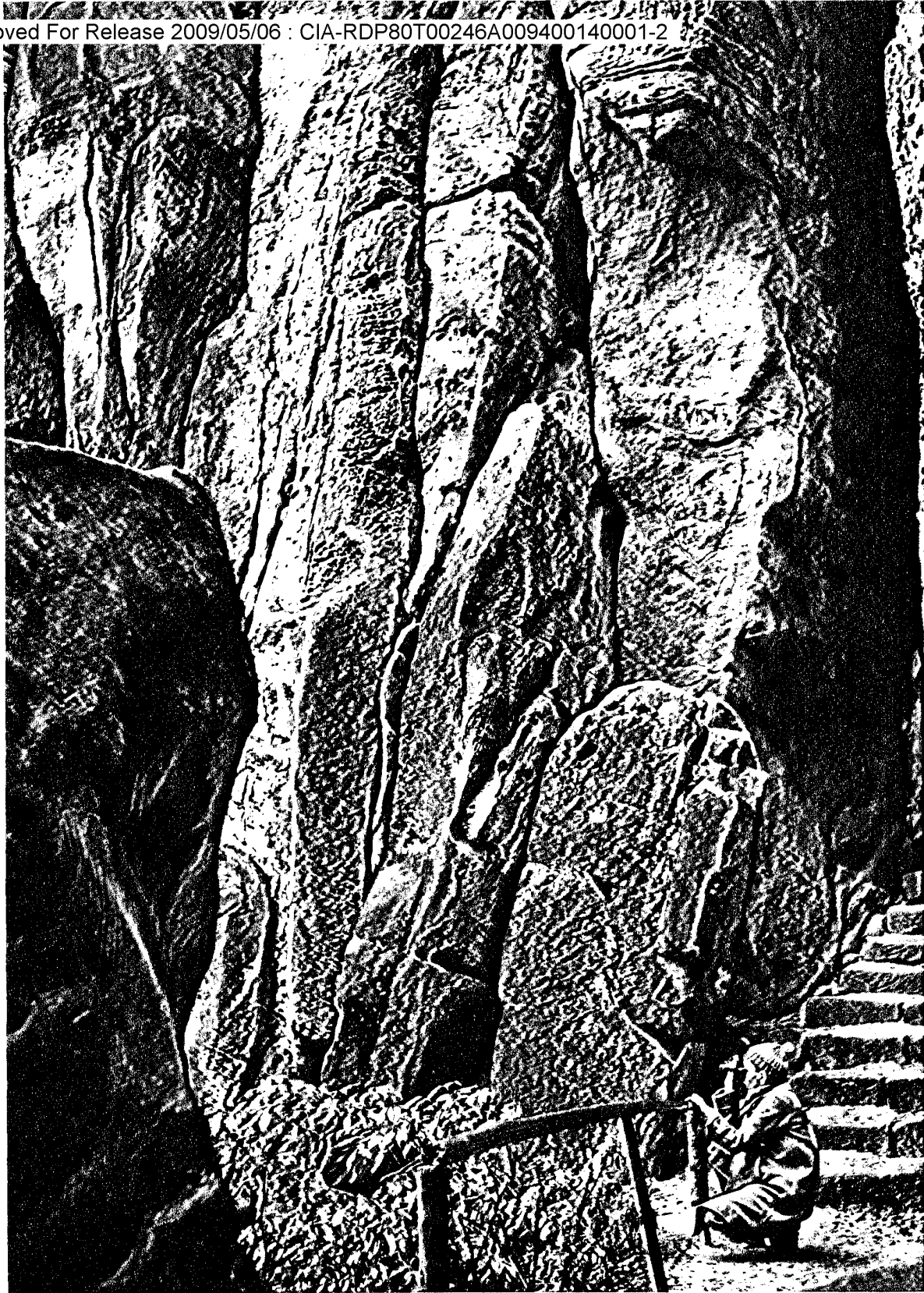




But a carpet of flowers, right up to the window



The beauty of the depths

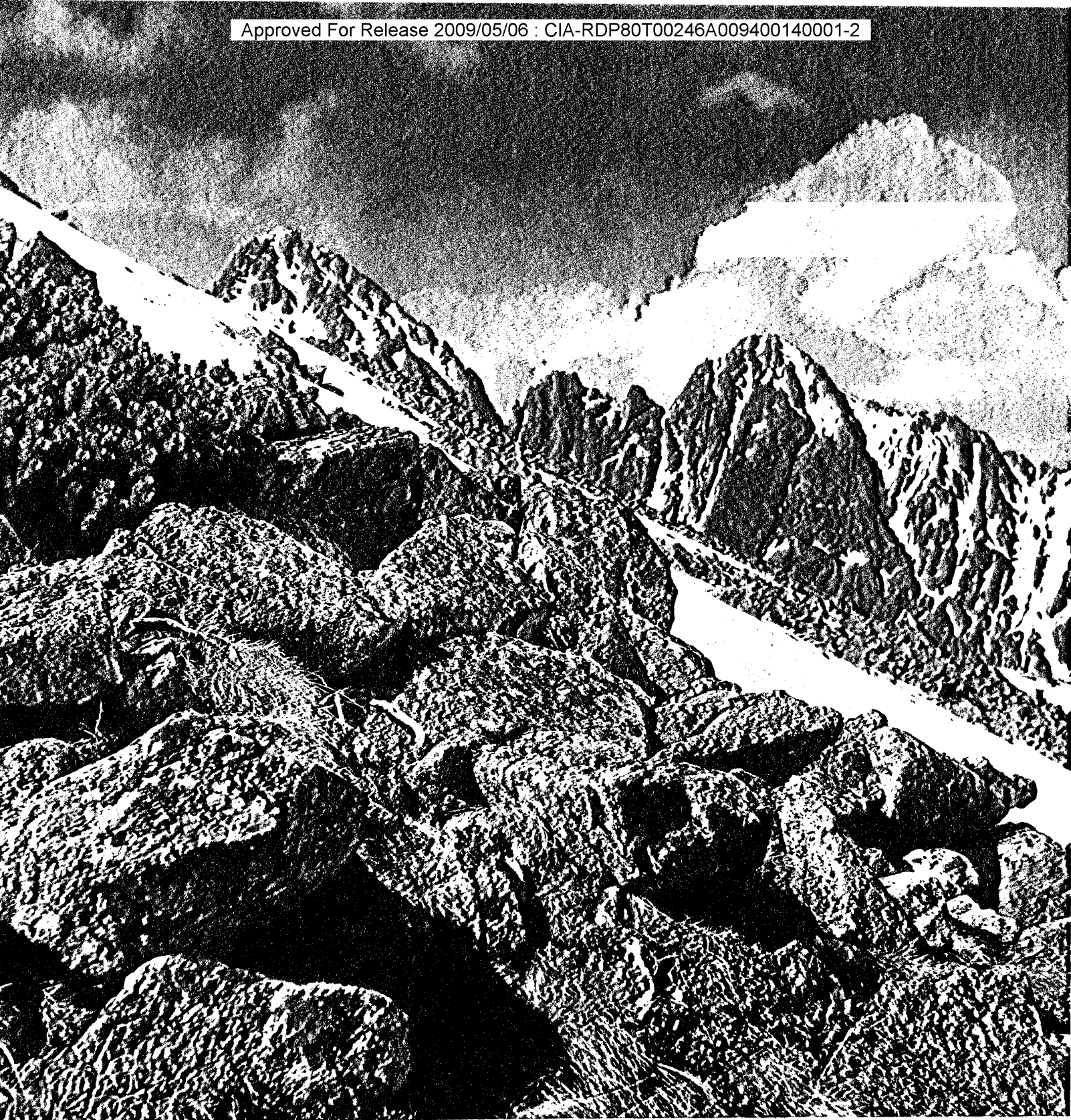


The thrill of the heights

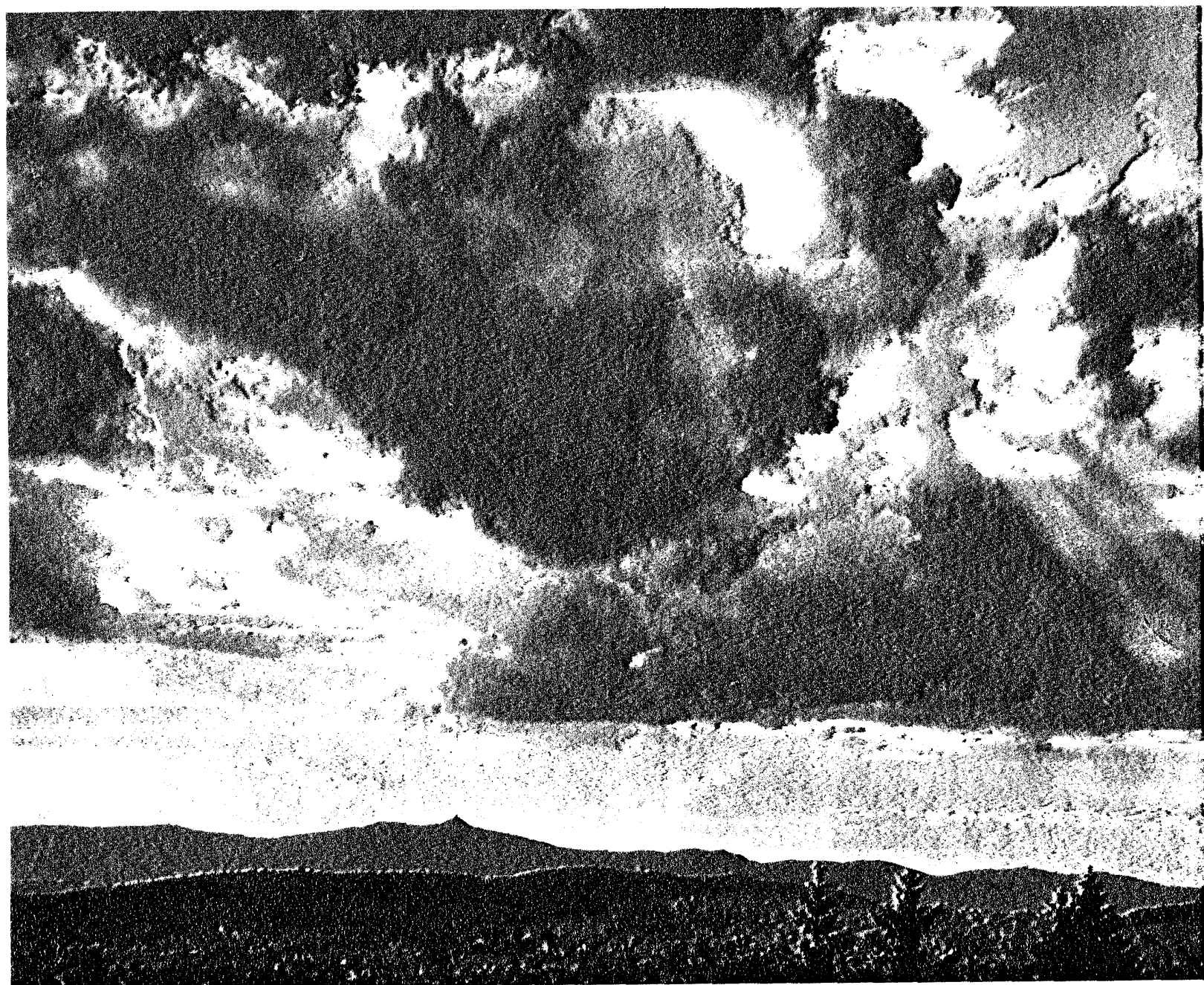


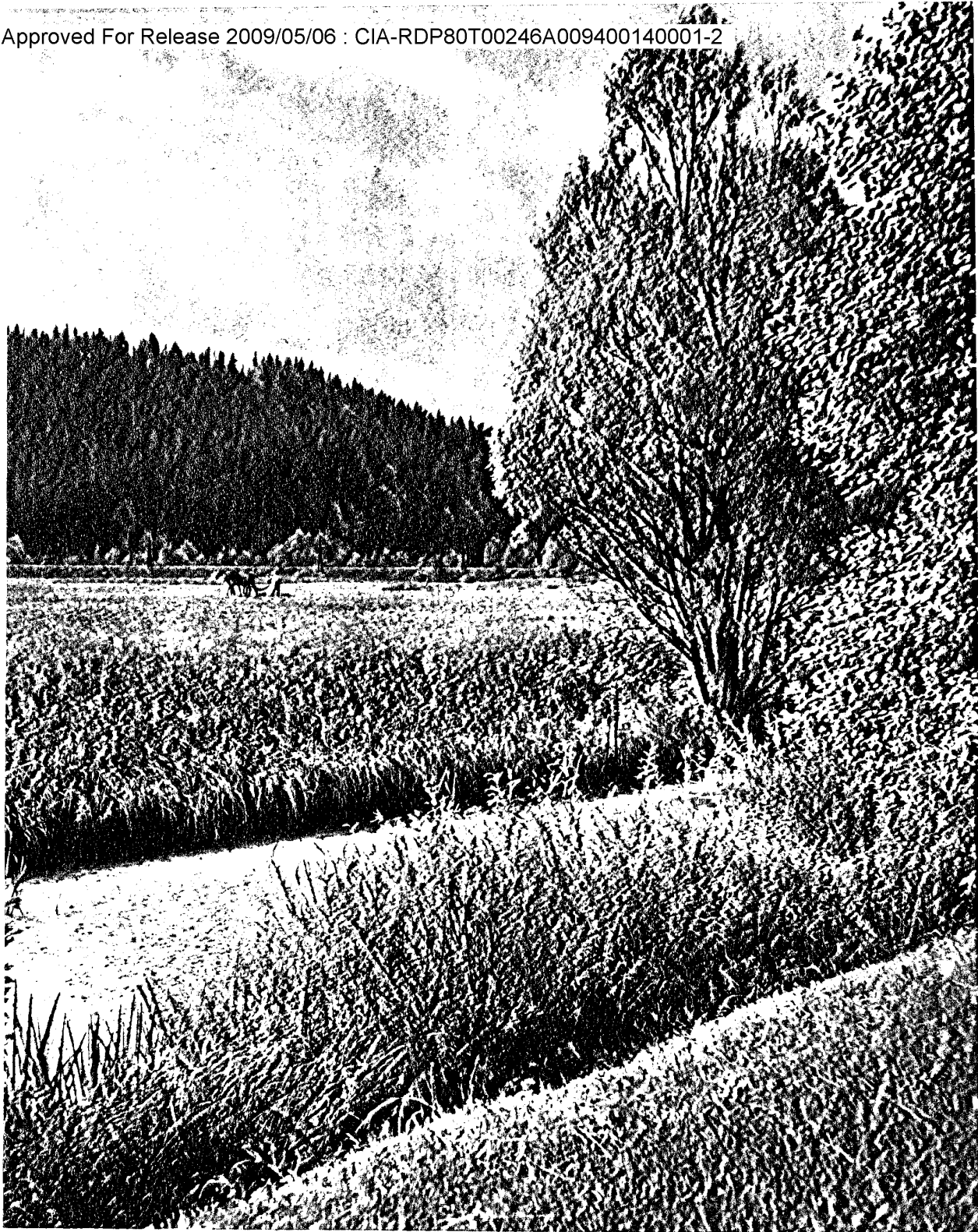


...but skis announce the presence of man

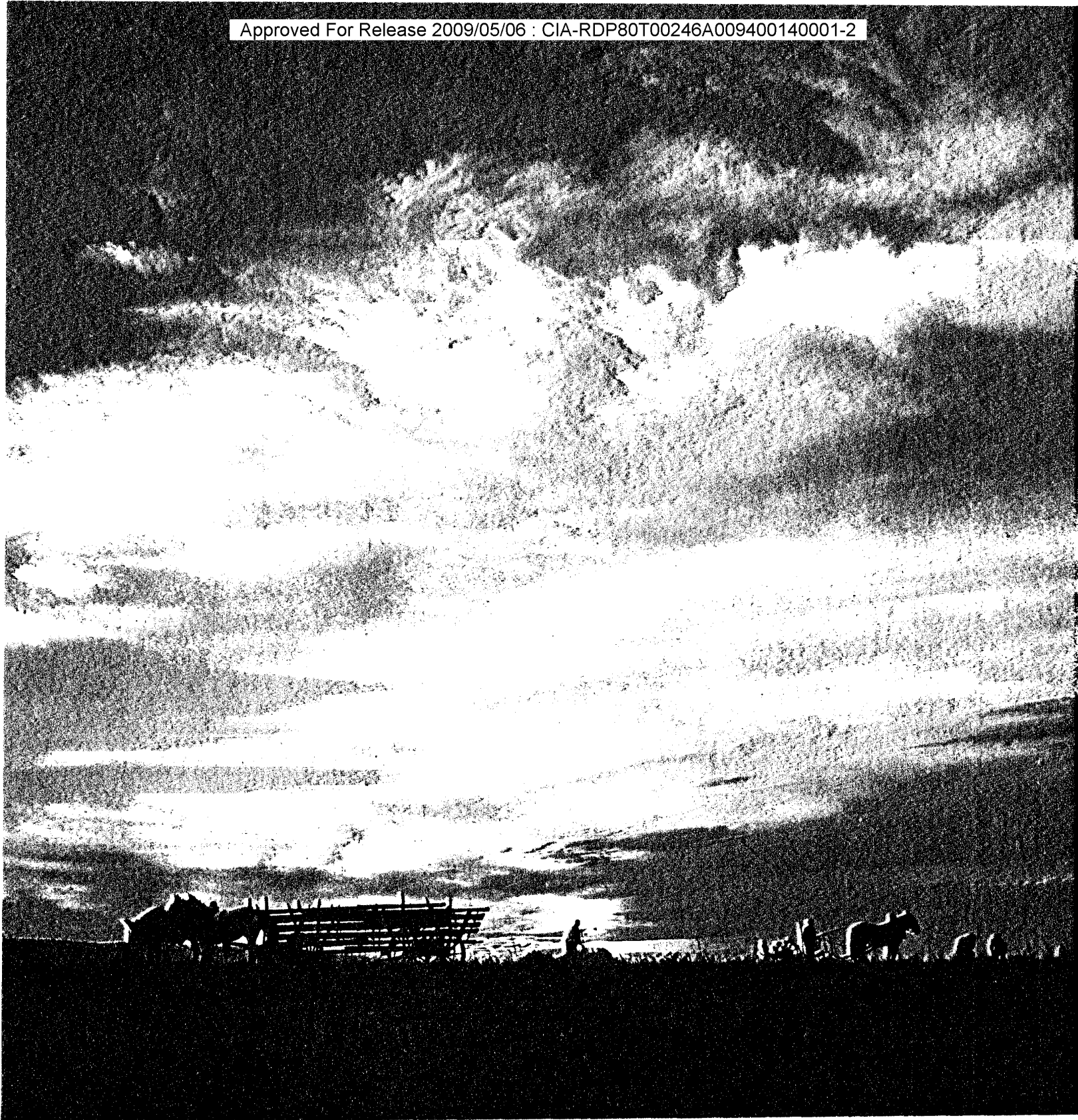


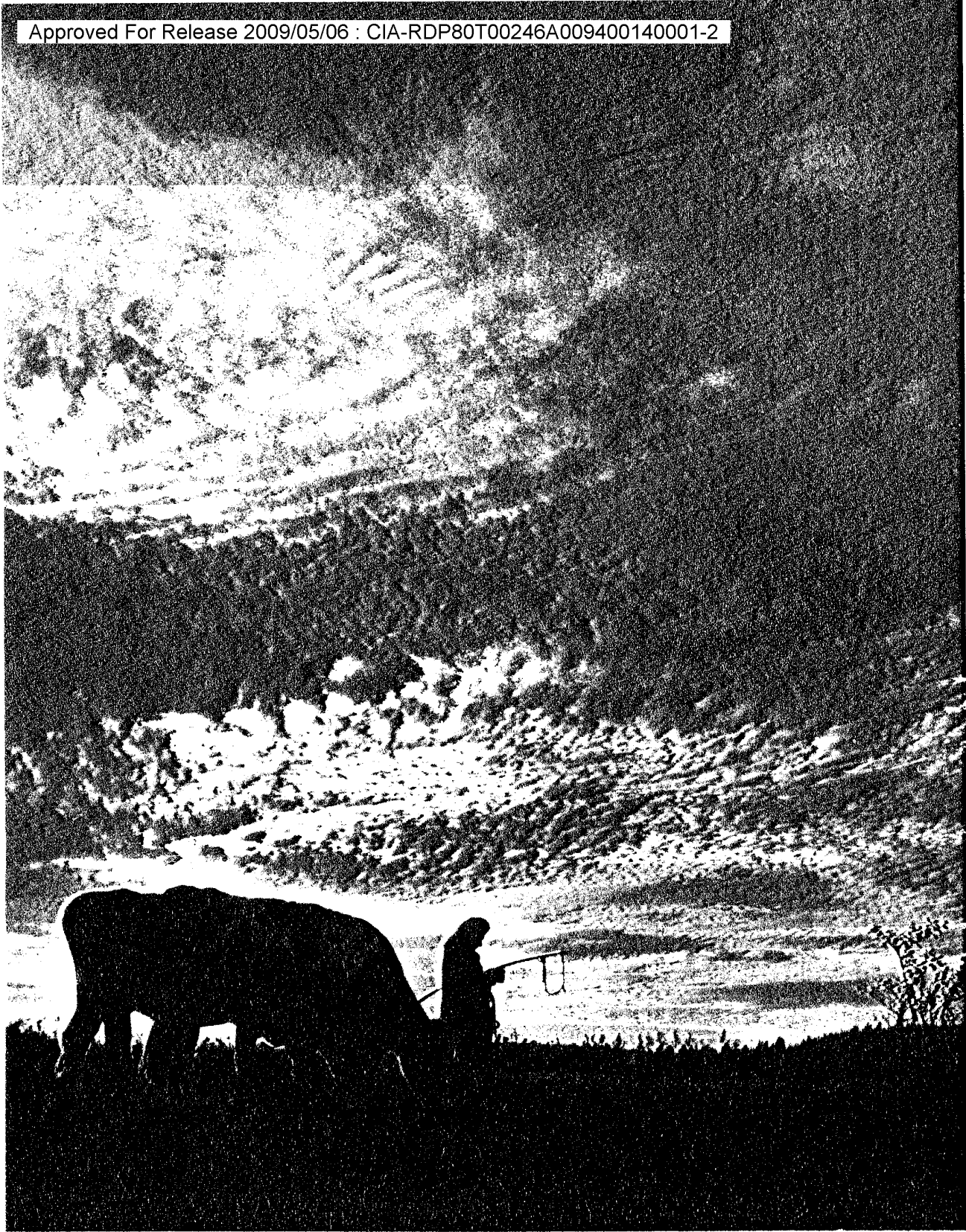




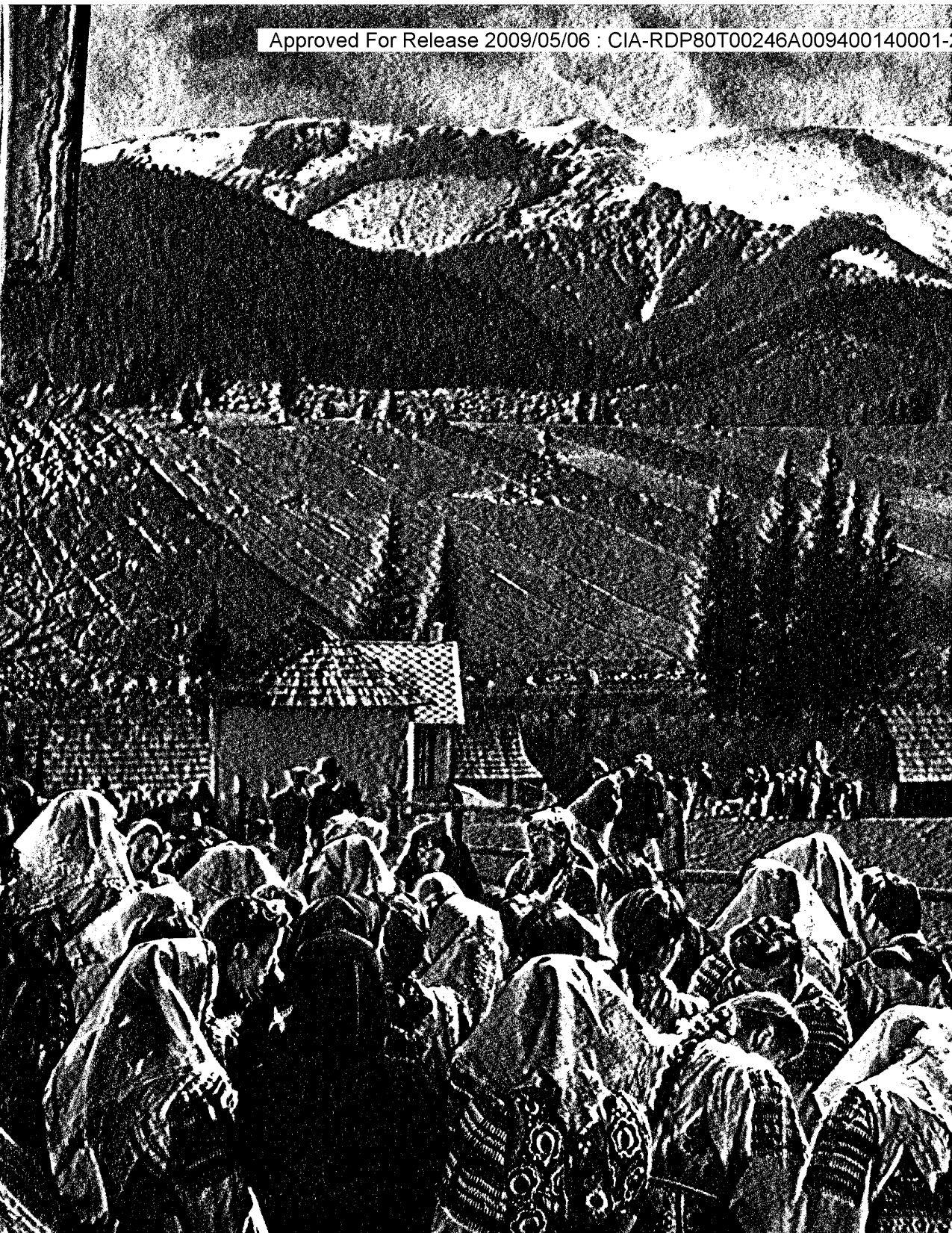


Smiling earth





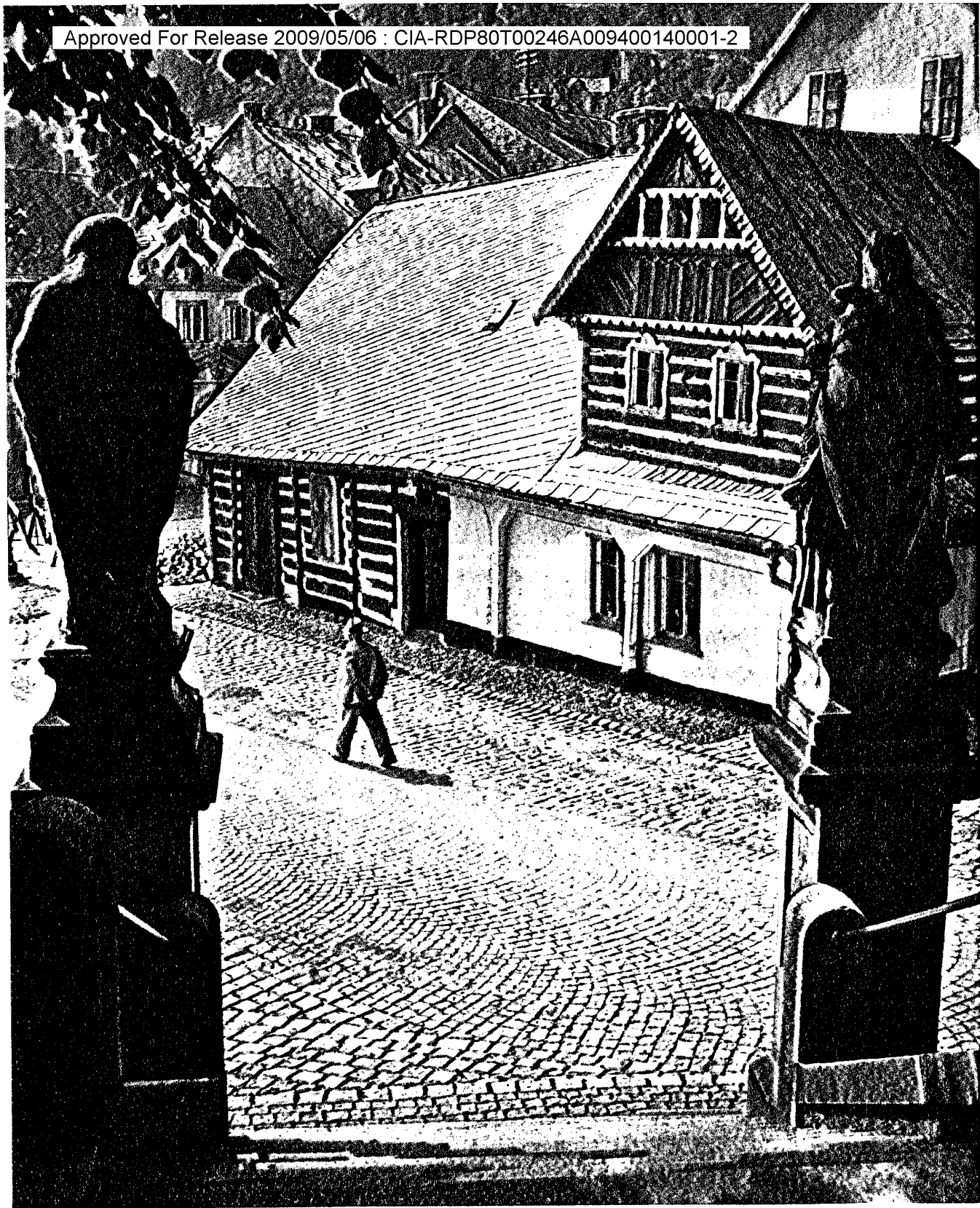
Timeless beauty



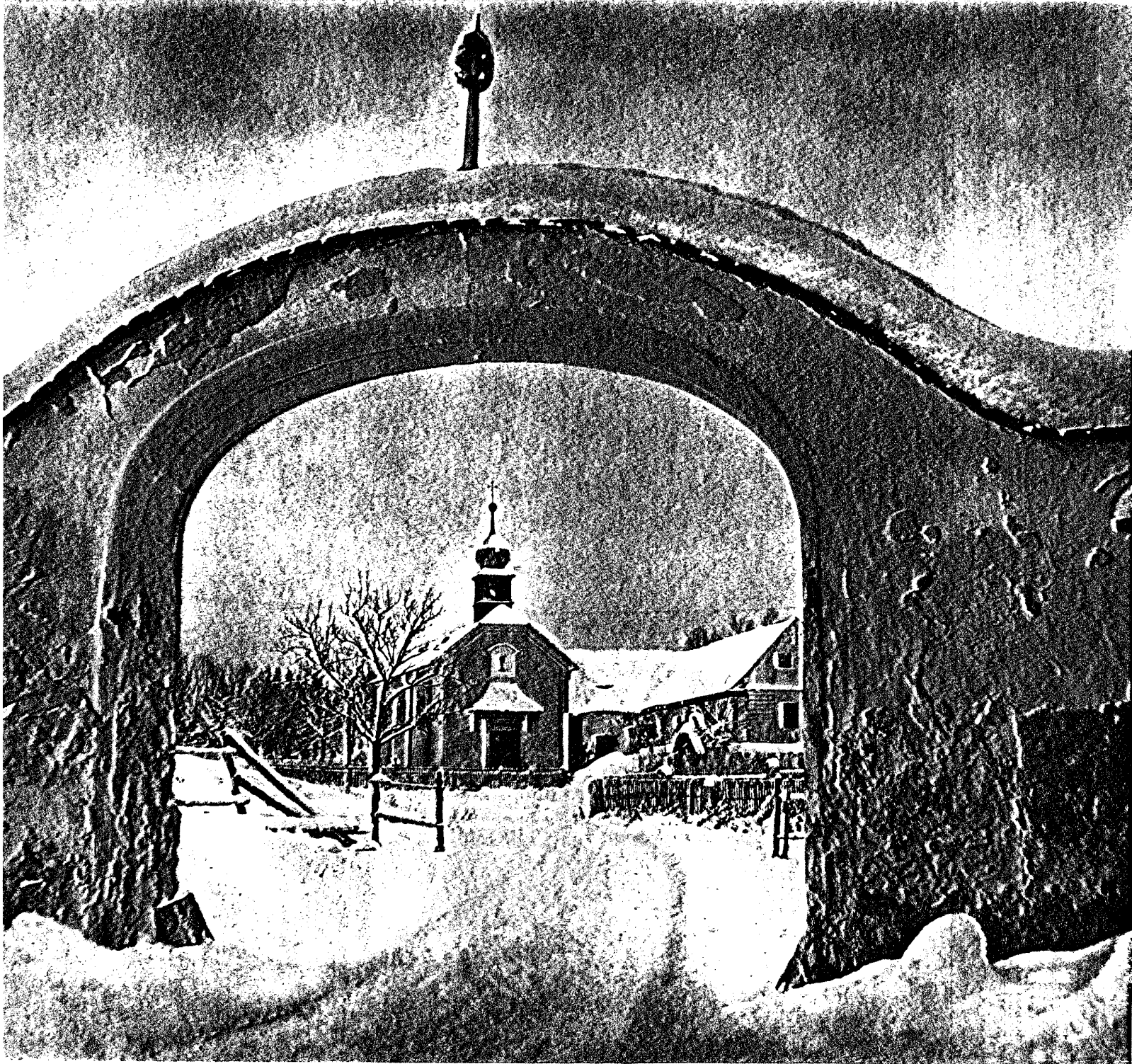


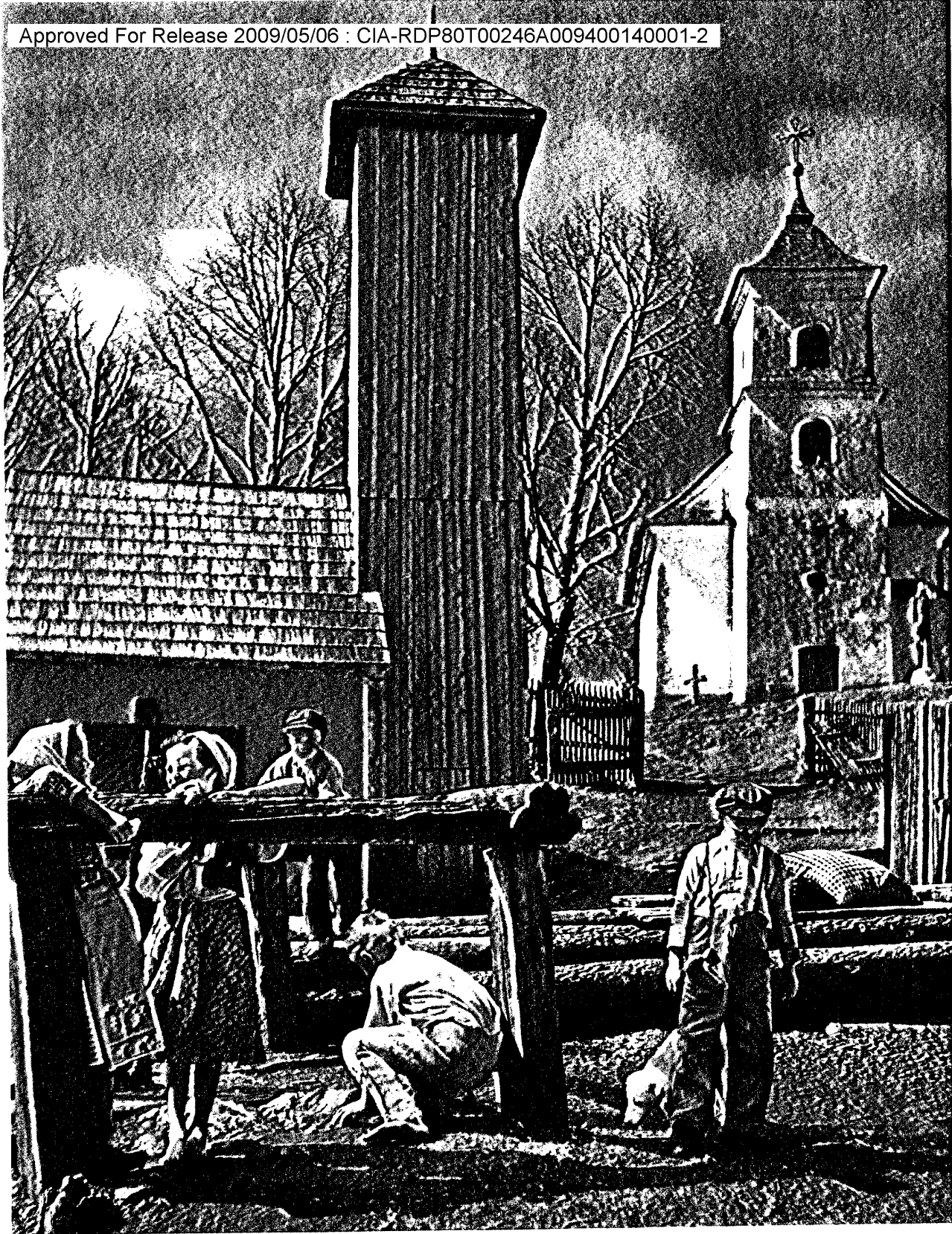
The homes of hard-working people



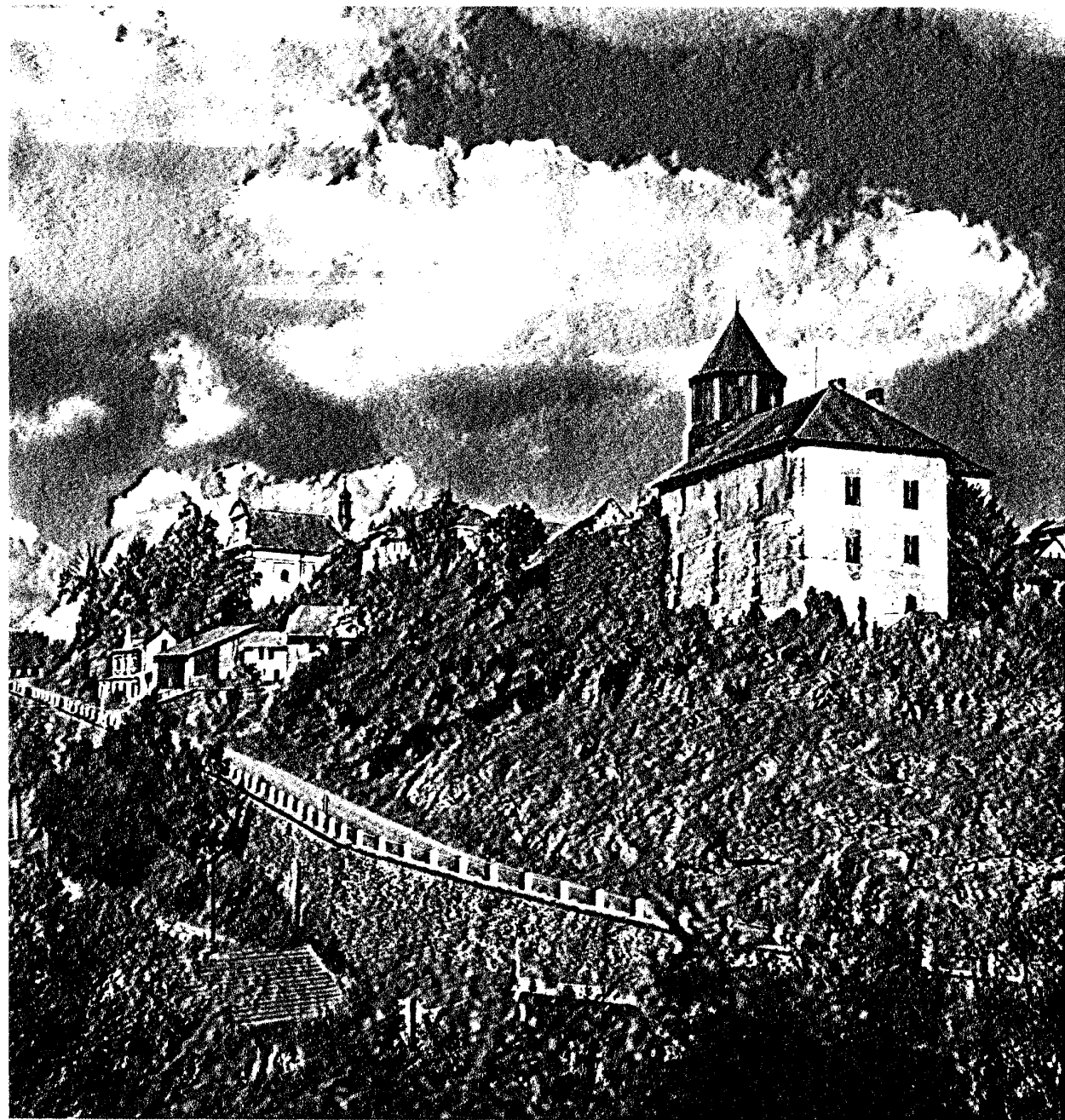


Black and White Beauty





The charm of innocence

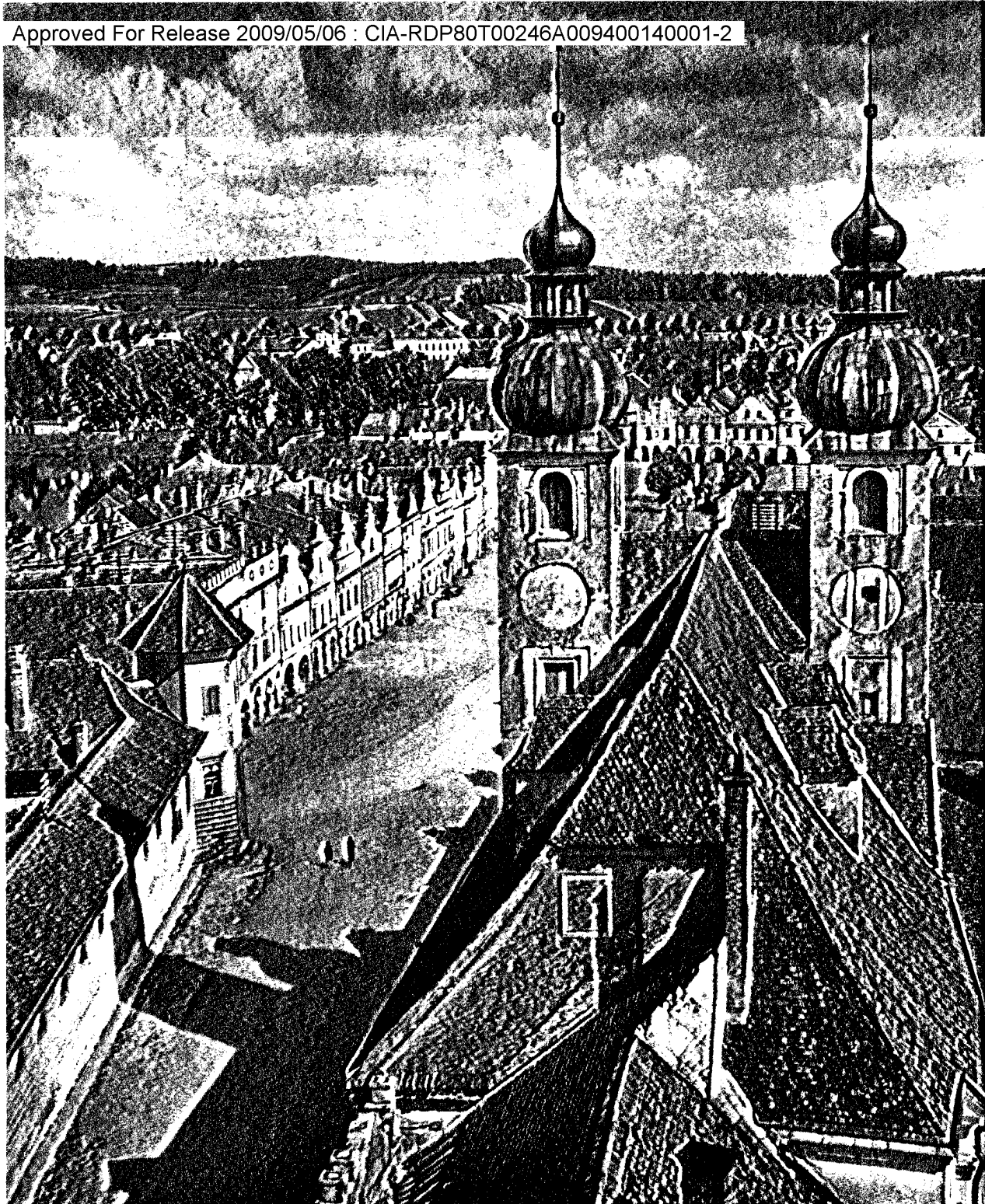




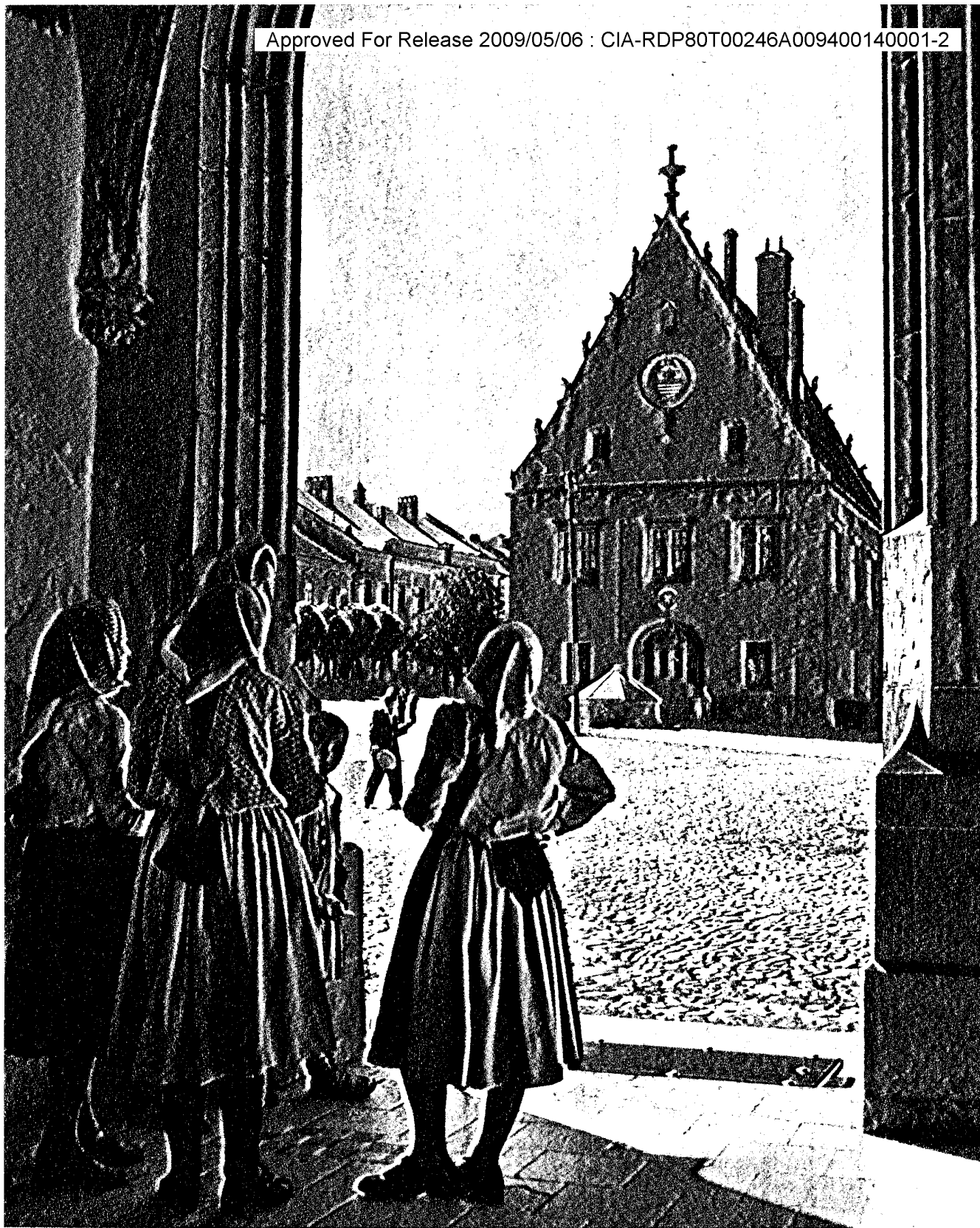
...preening itself in the water-mirror

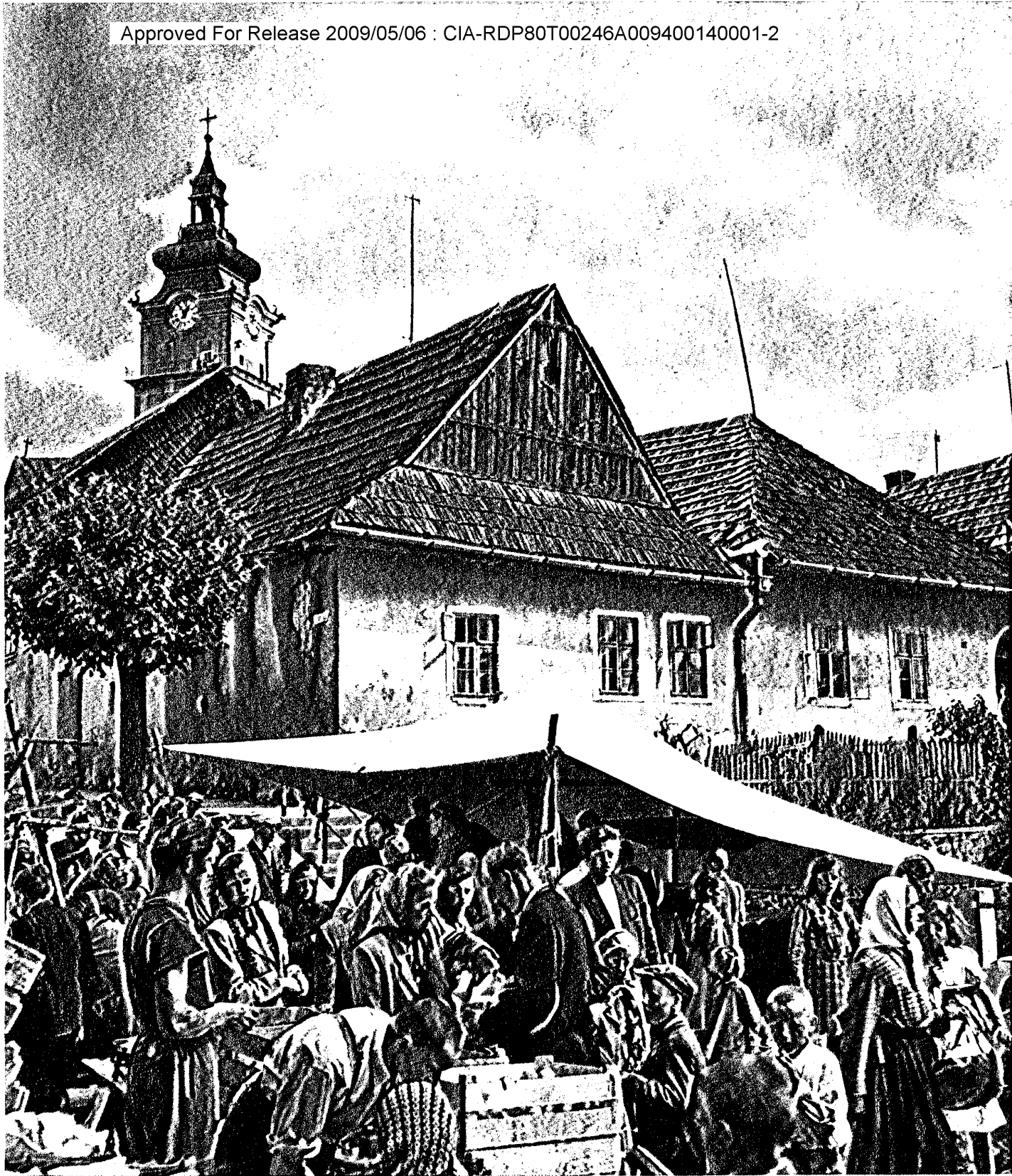
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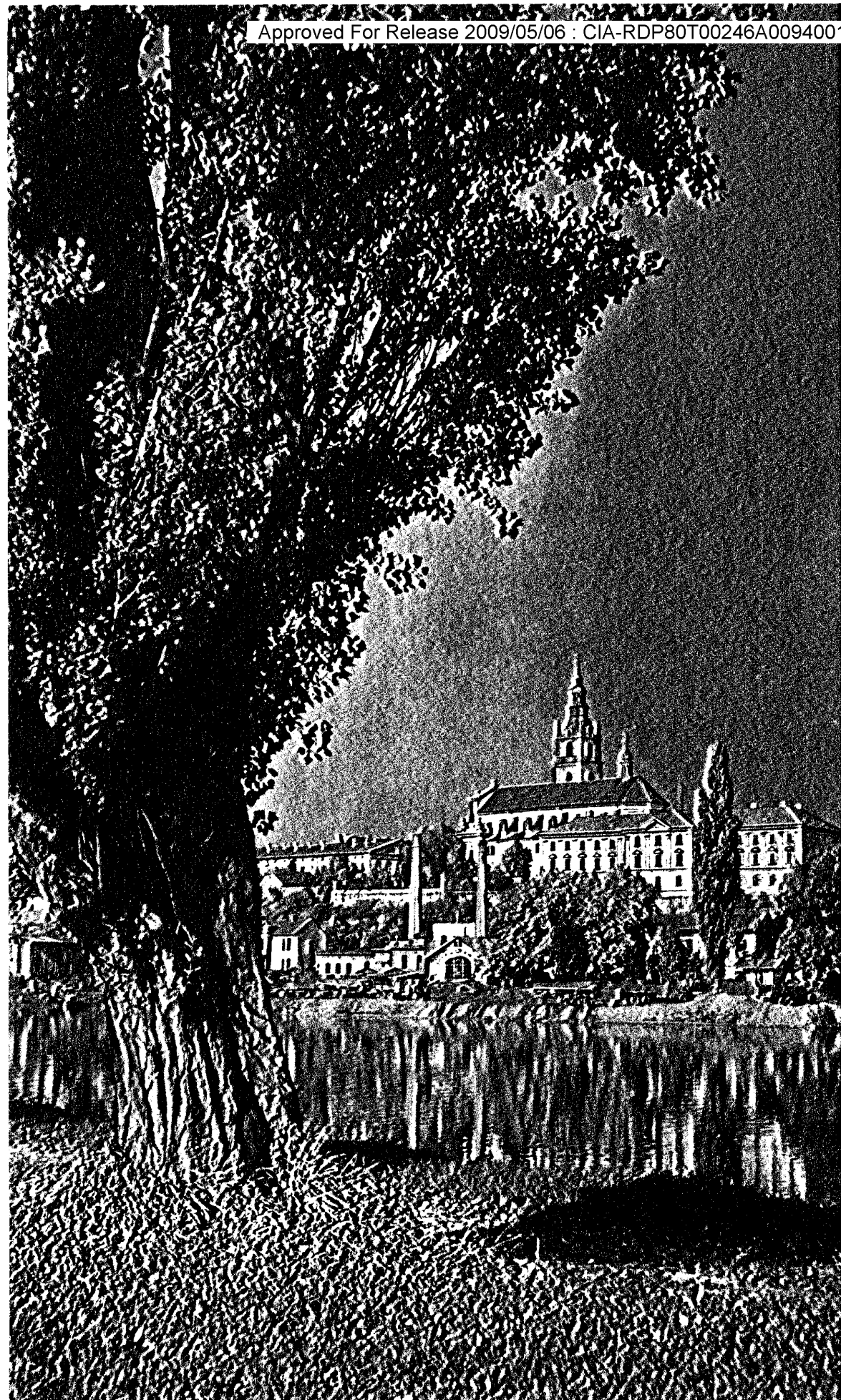


...even from a bird's eye view

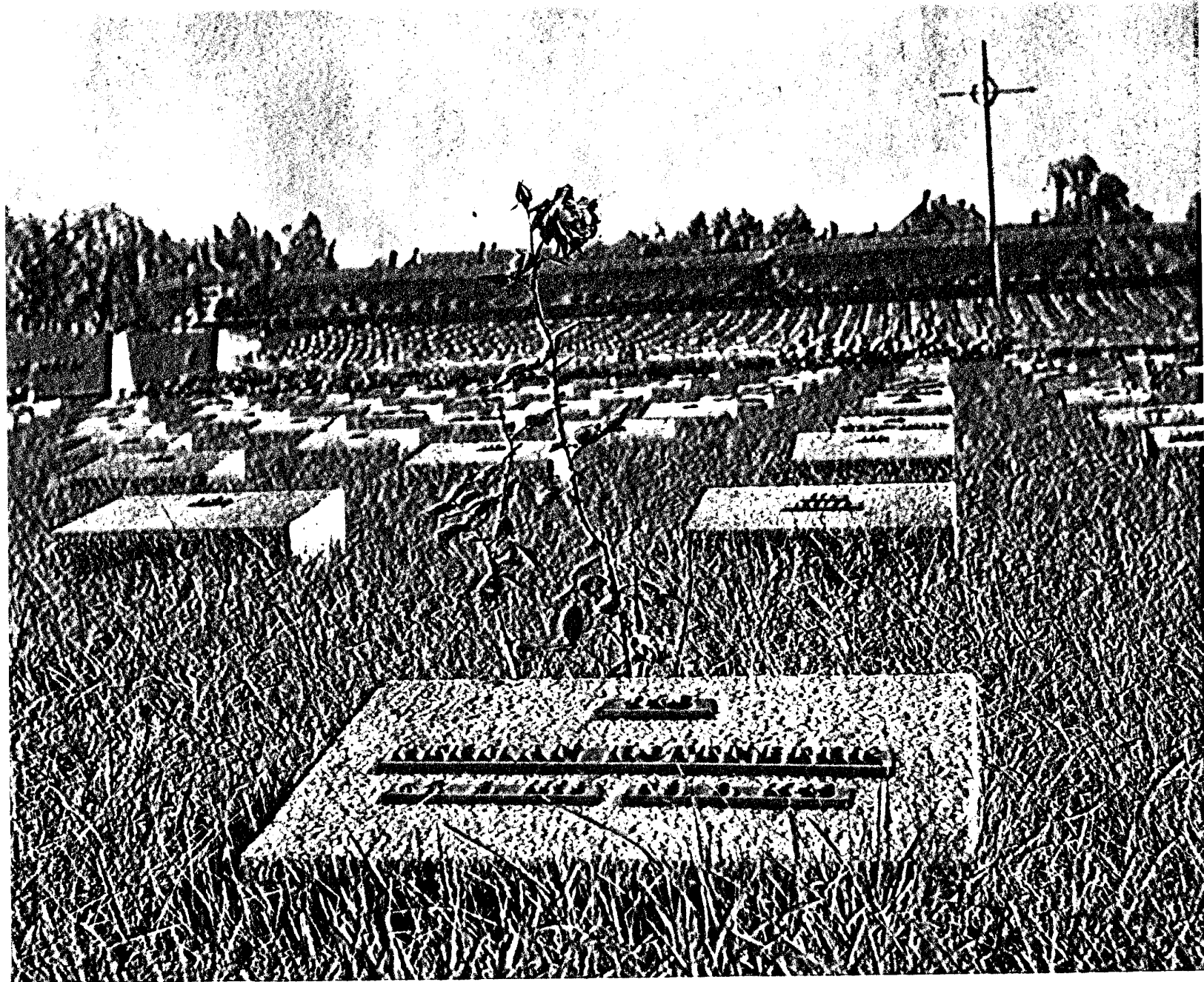




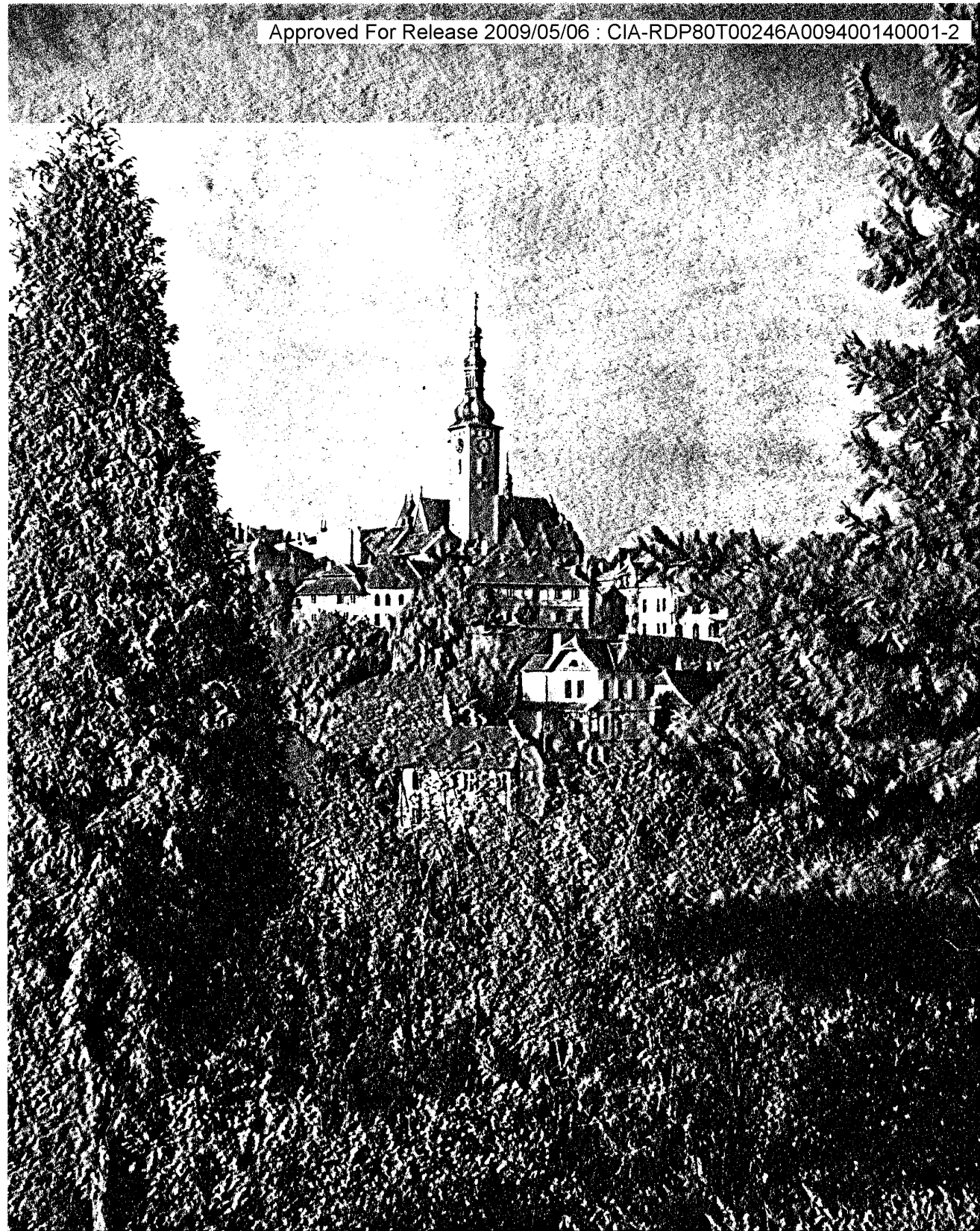
But the daily round is important

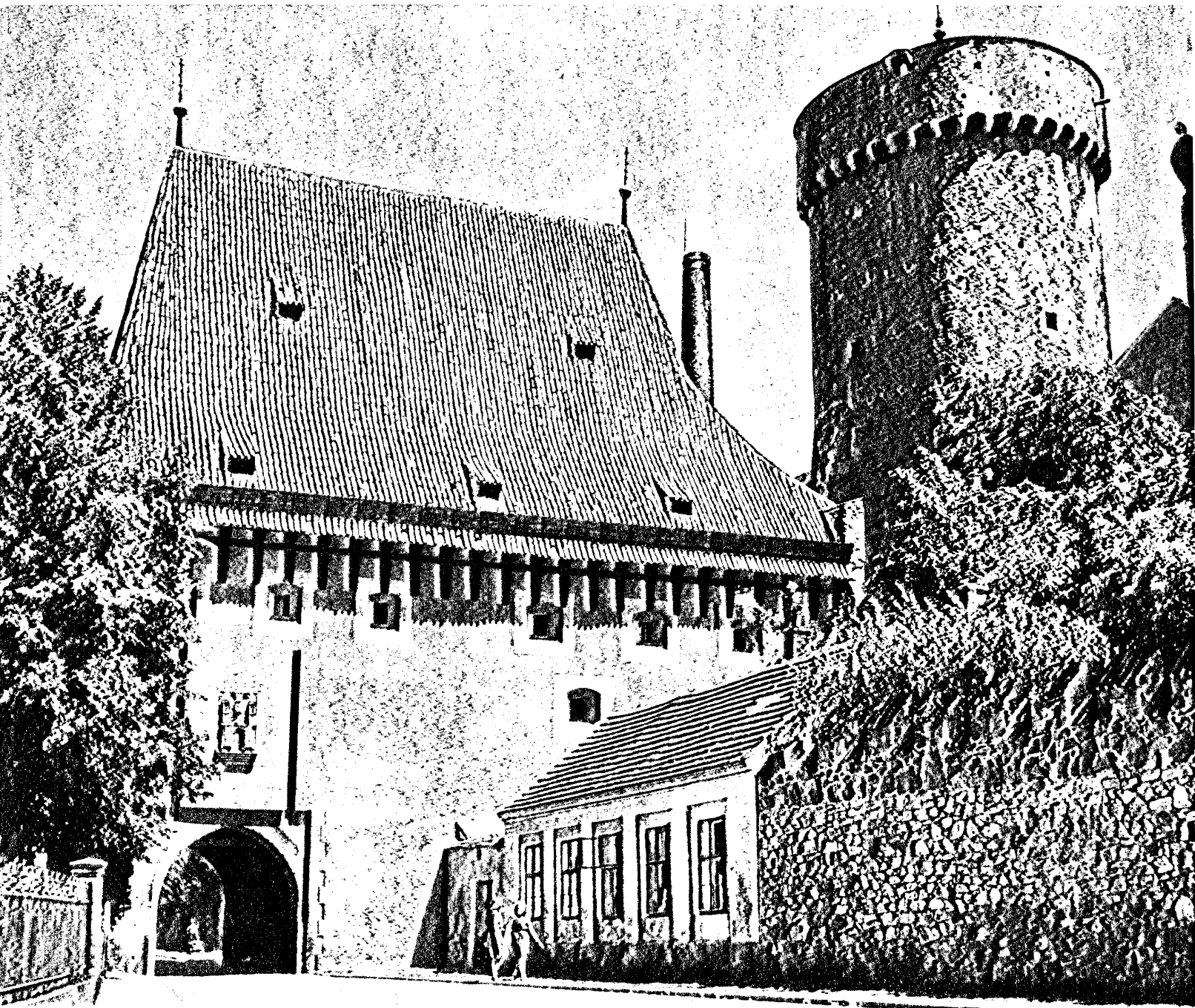


The seat of the Bishops
should ring with prayers

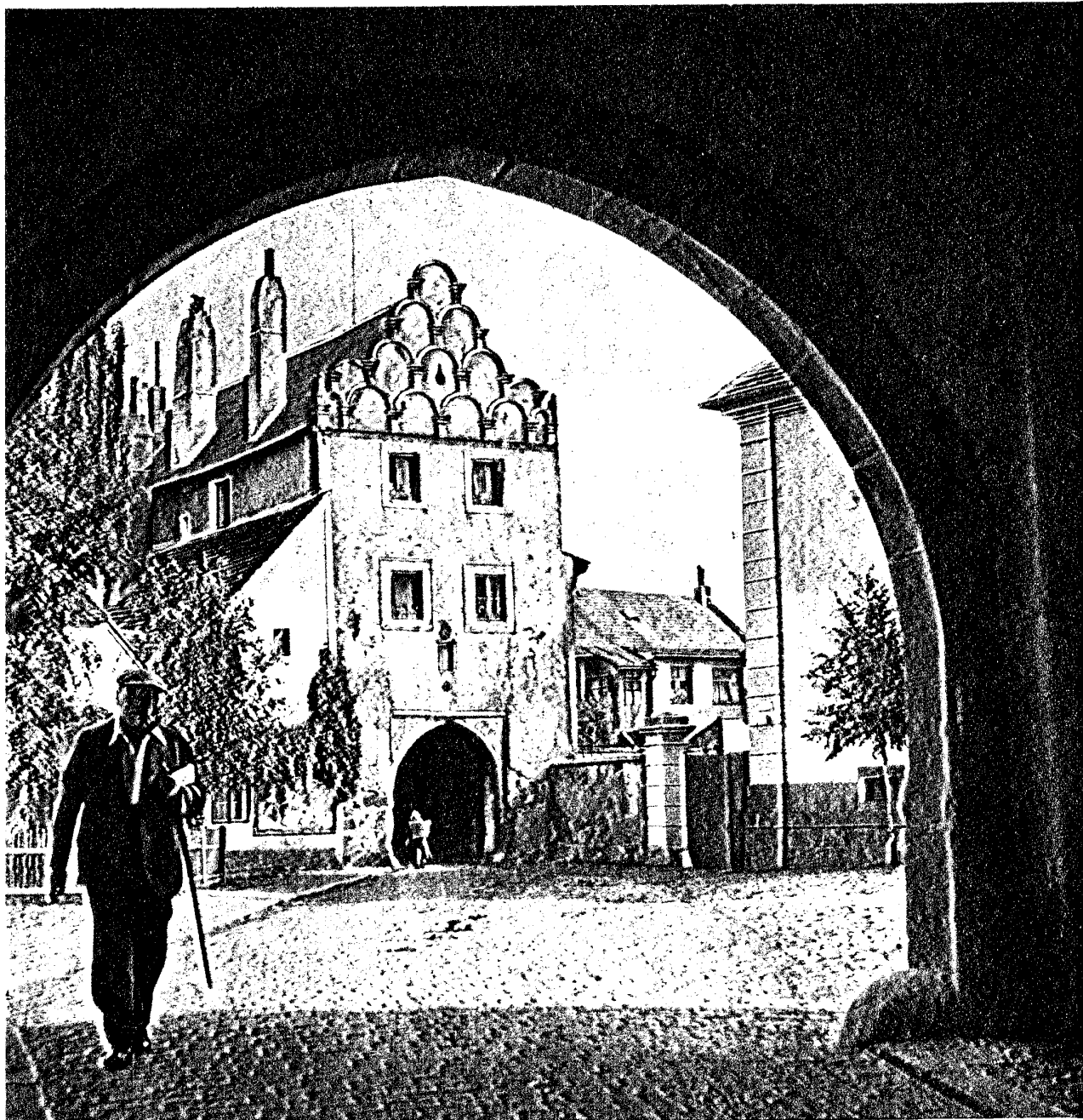


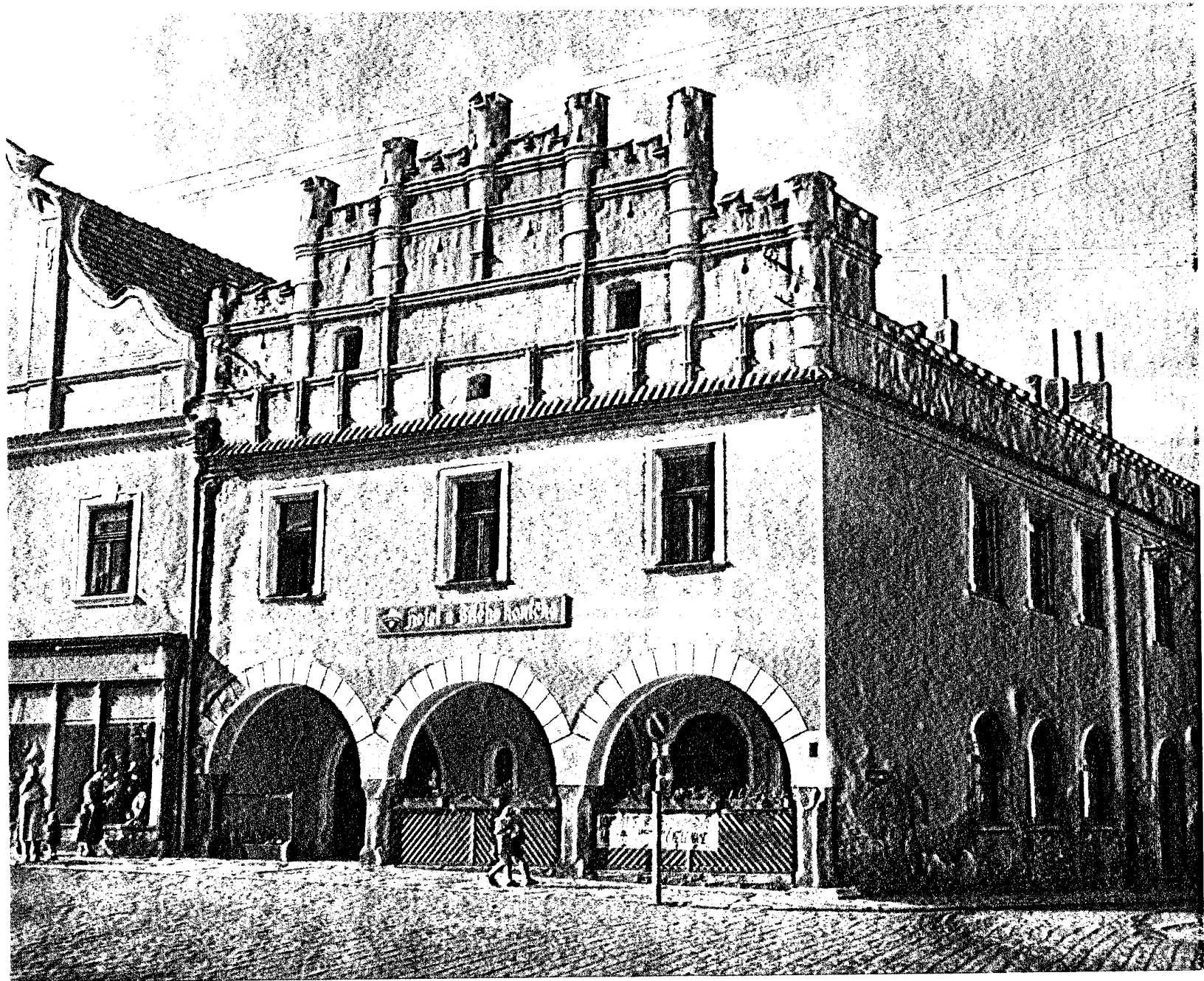
...for the victims of the war in the National Cemetery



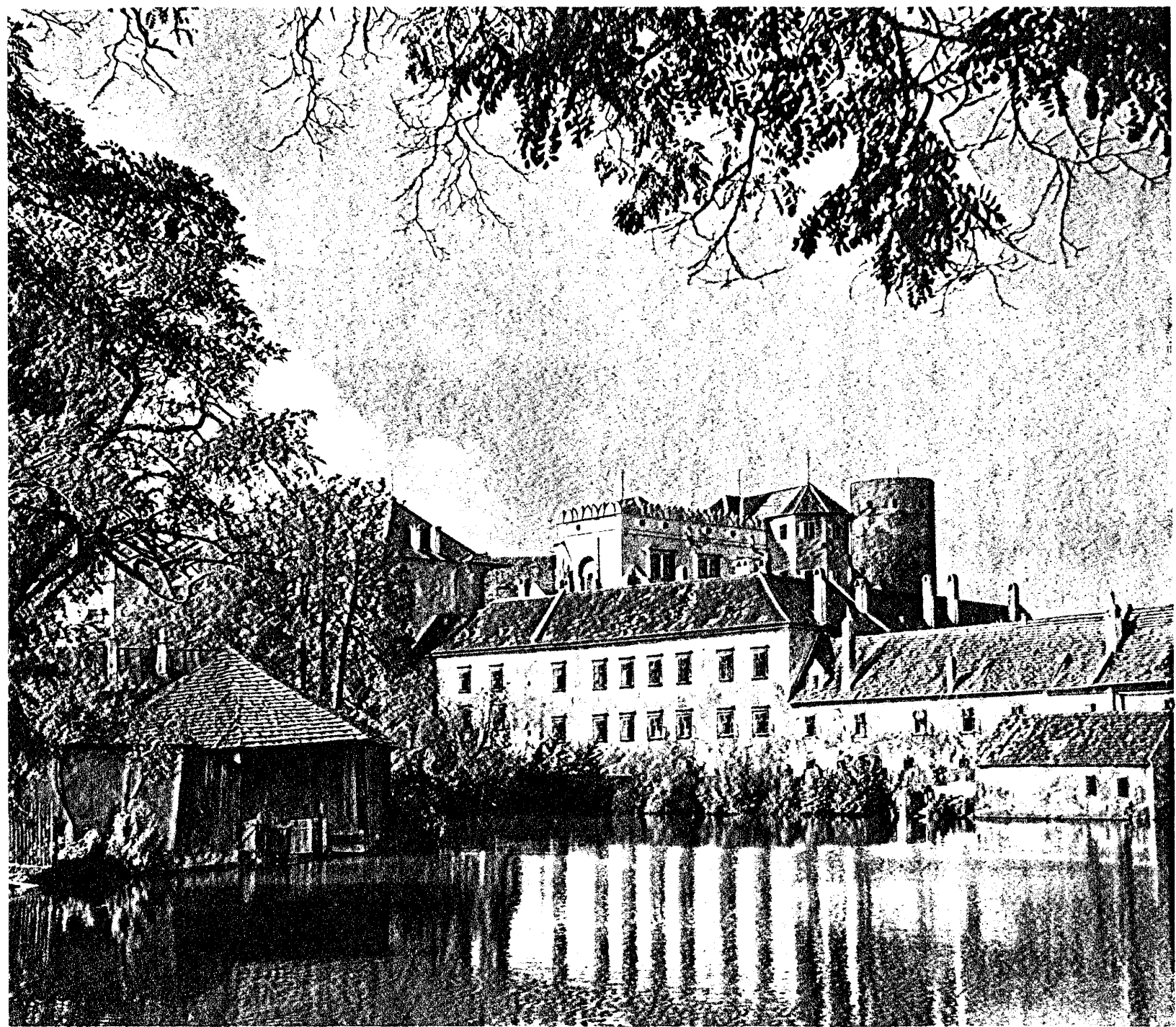


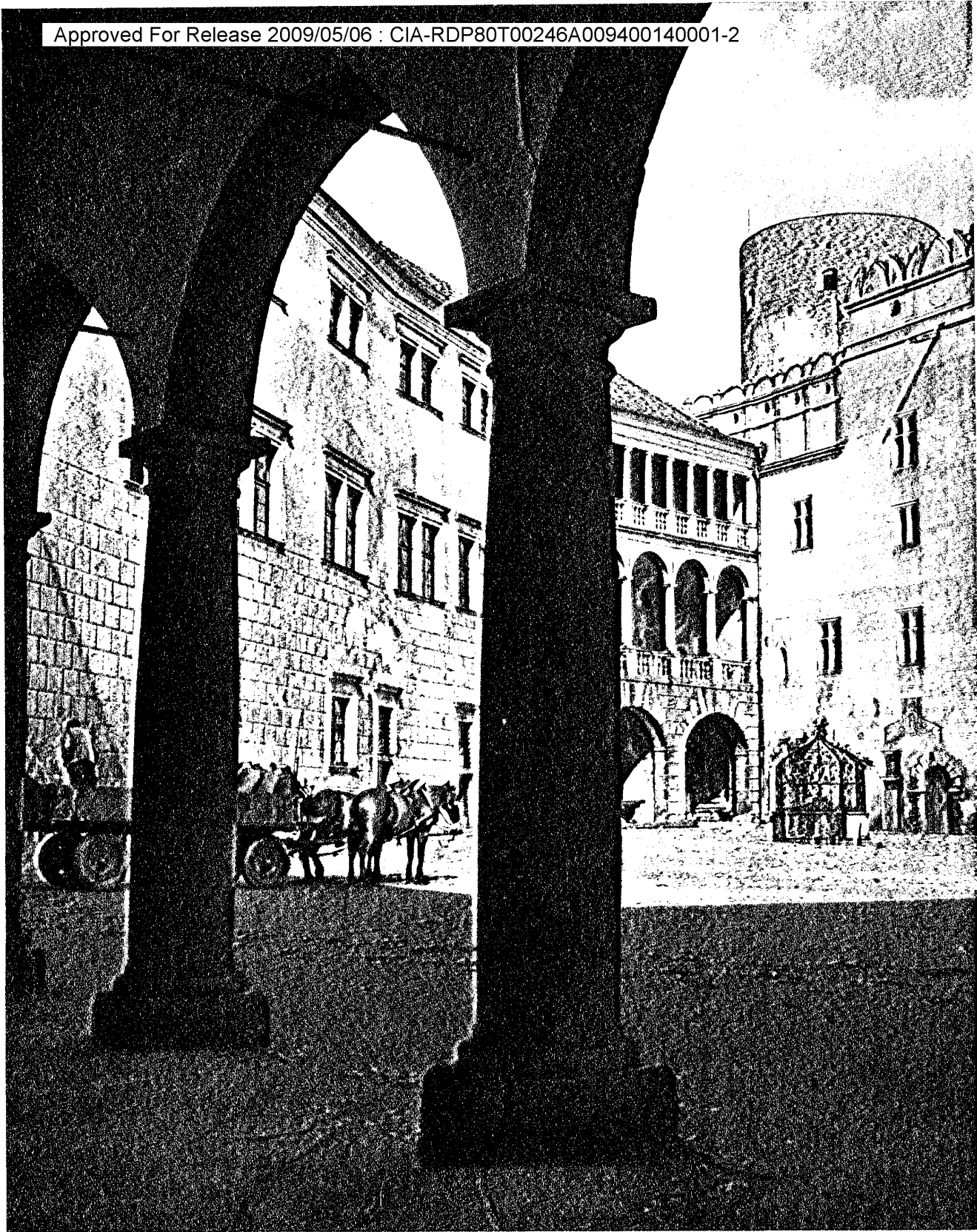
...but is rooted in stone





...but the present invades it





...the town dreams of the past



The glory of old guns
grows rusty

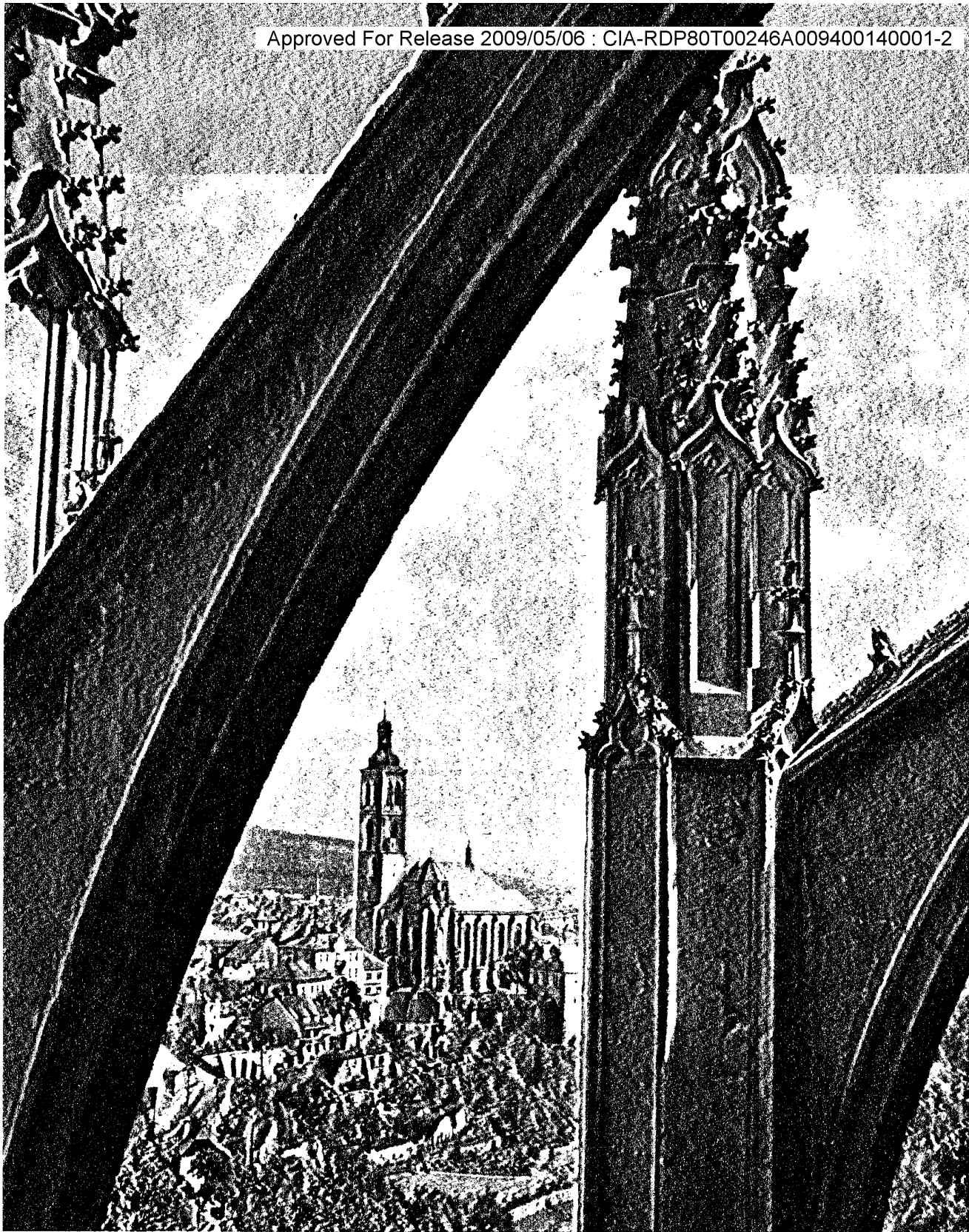
...but the beauty of old
spires lasts

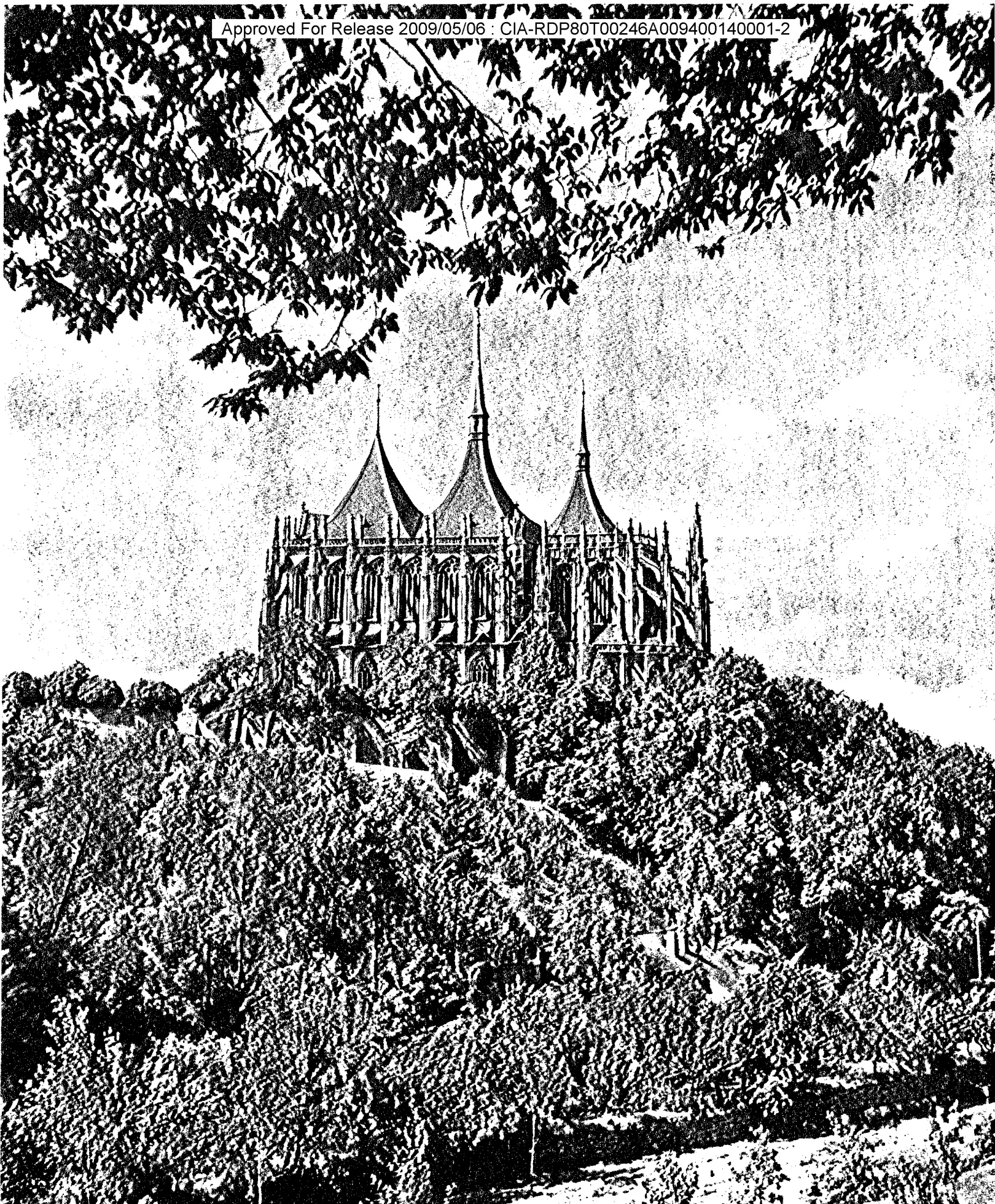
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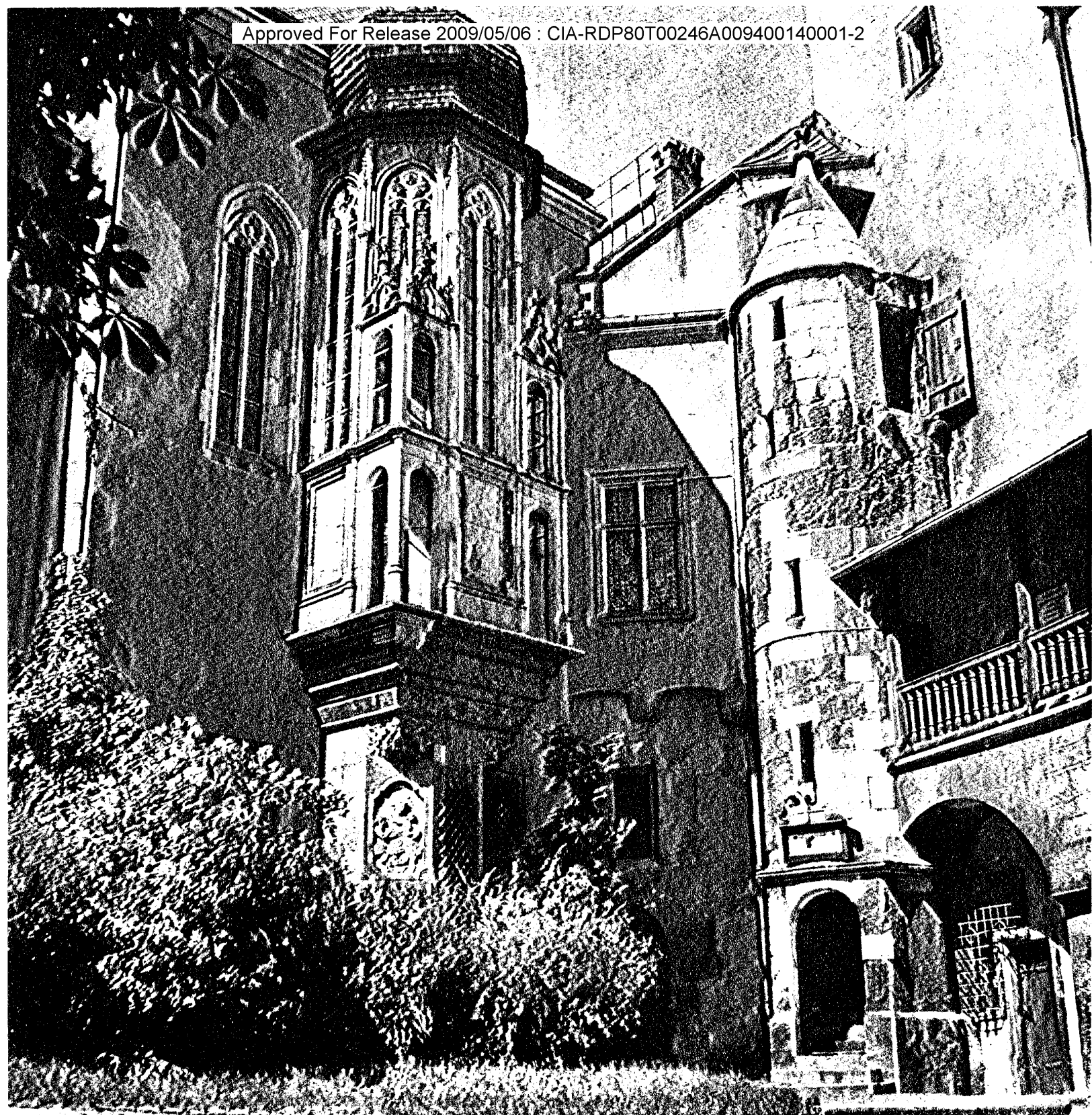


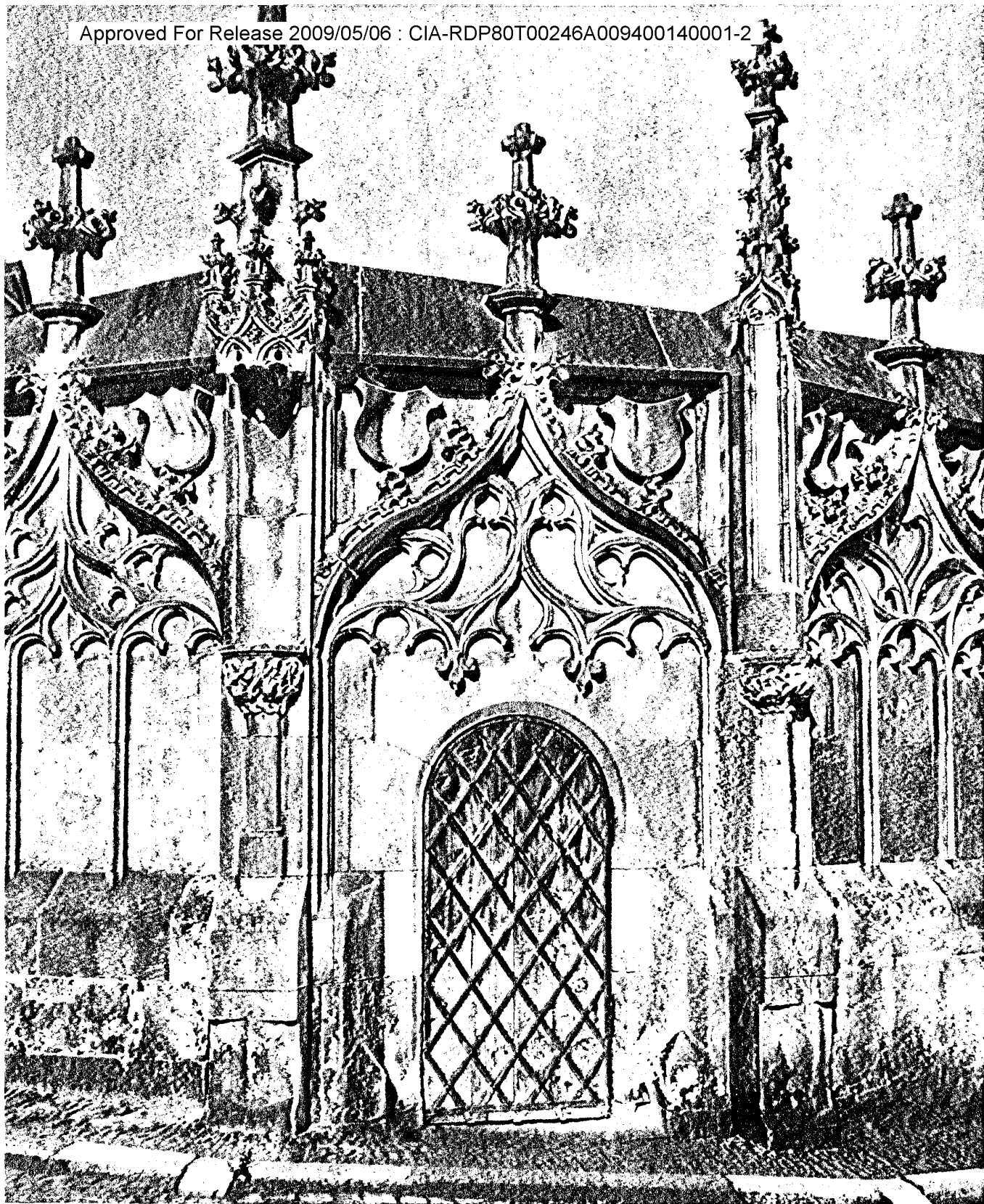


The housing of bygone times is not a subject for envy

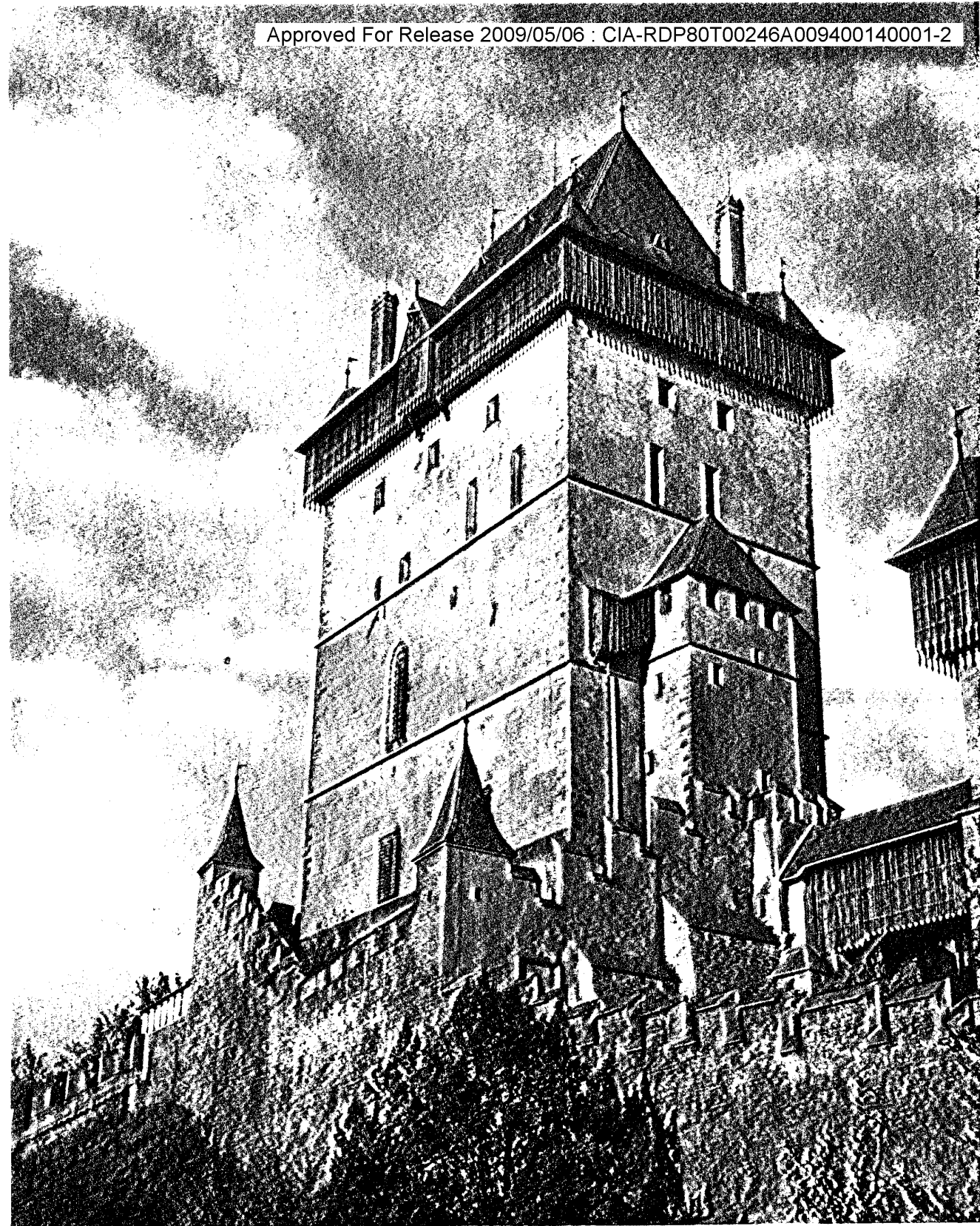


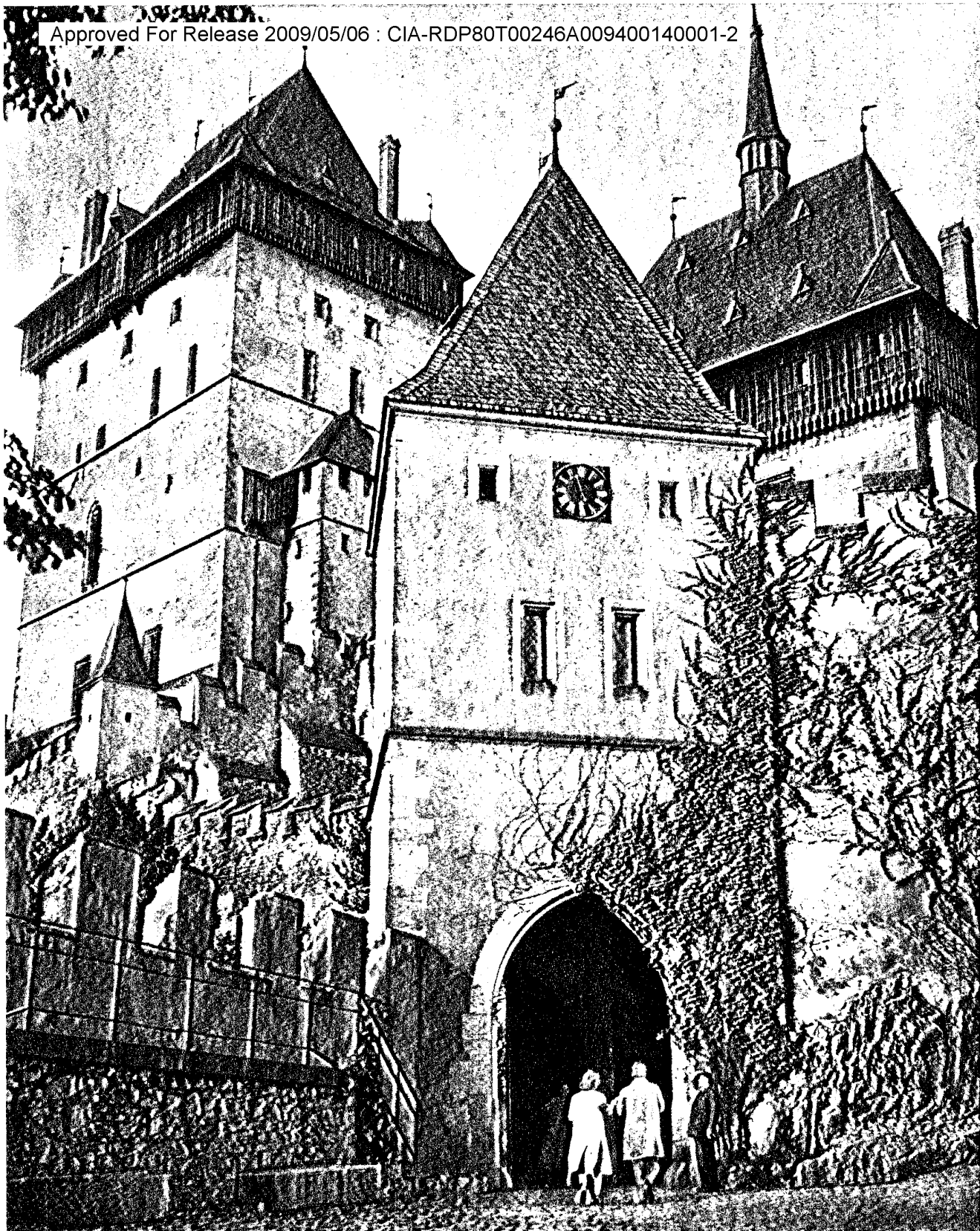




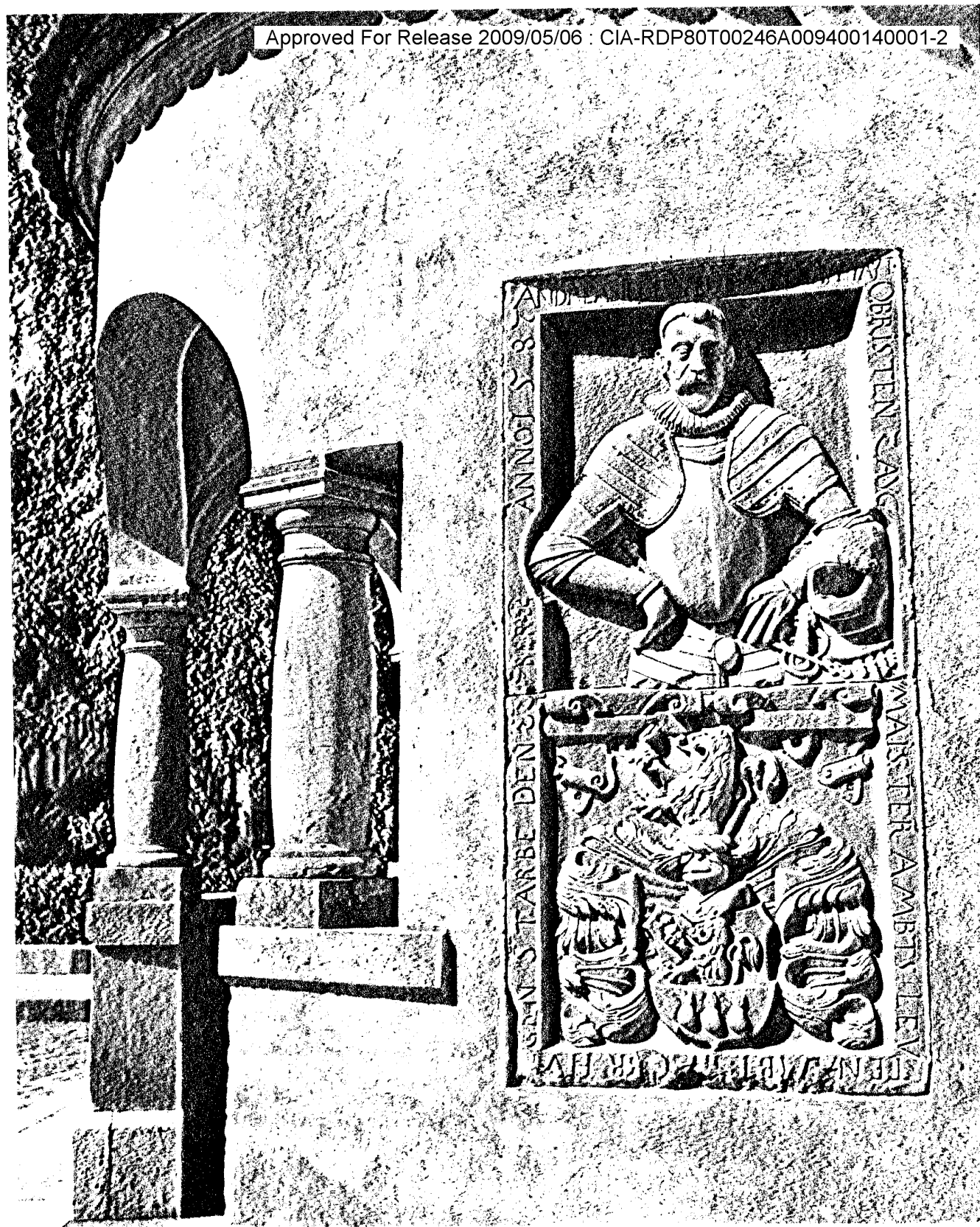


...even in fountains

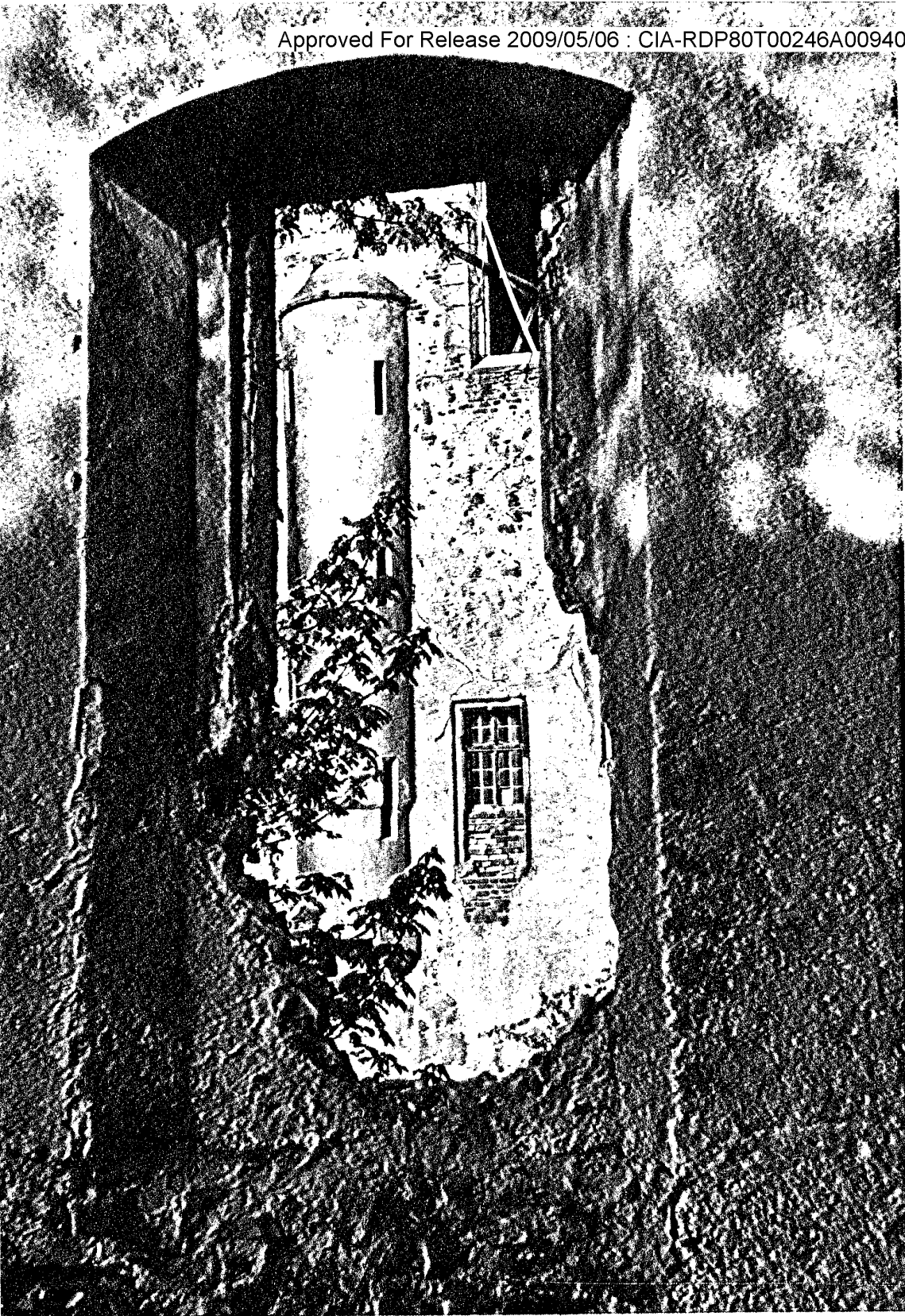


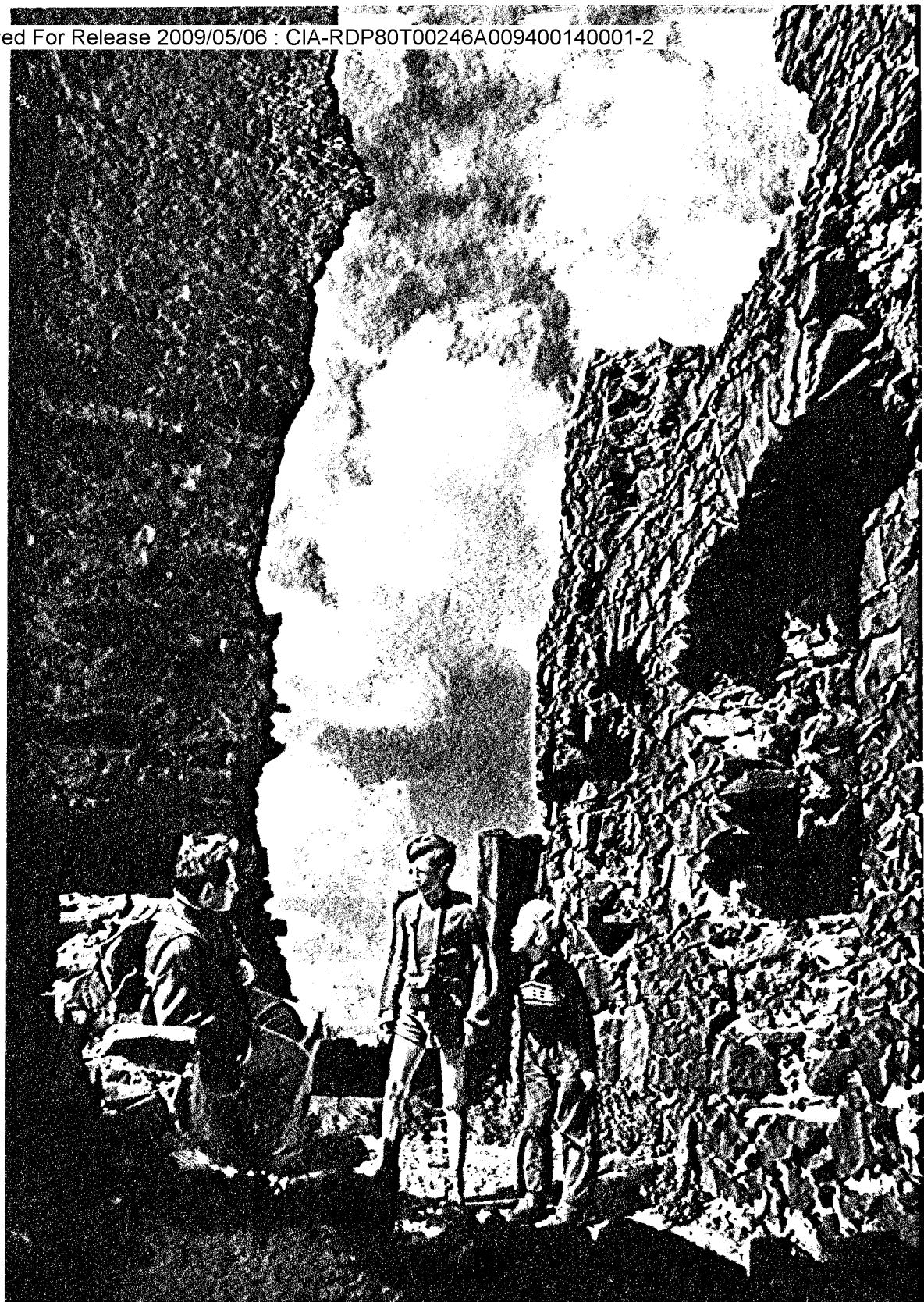


...and lovers without number through its gates

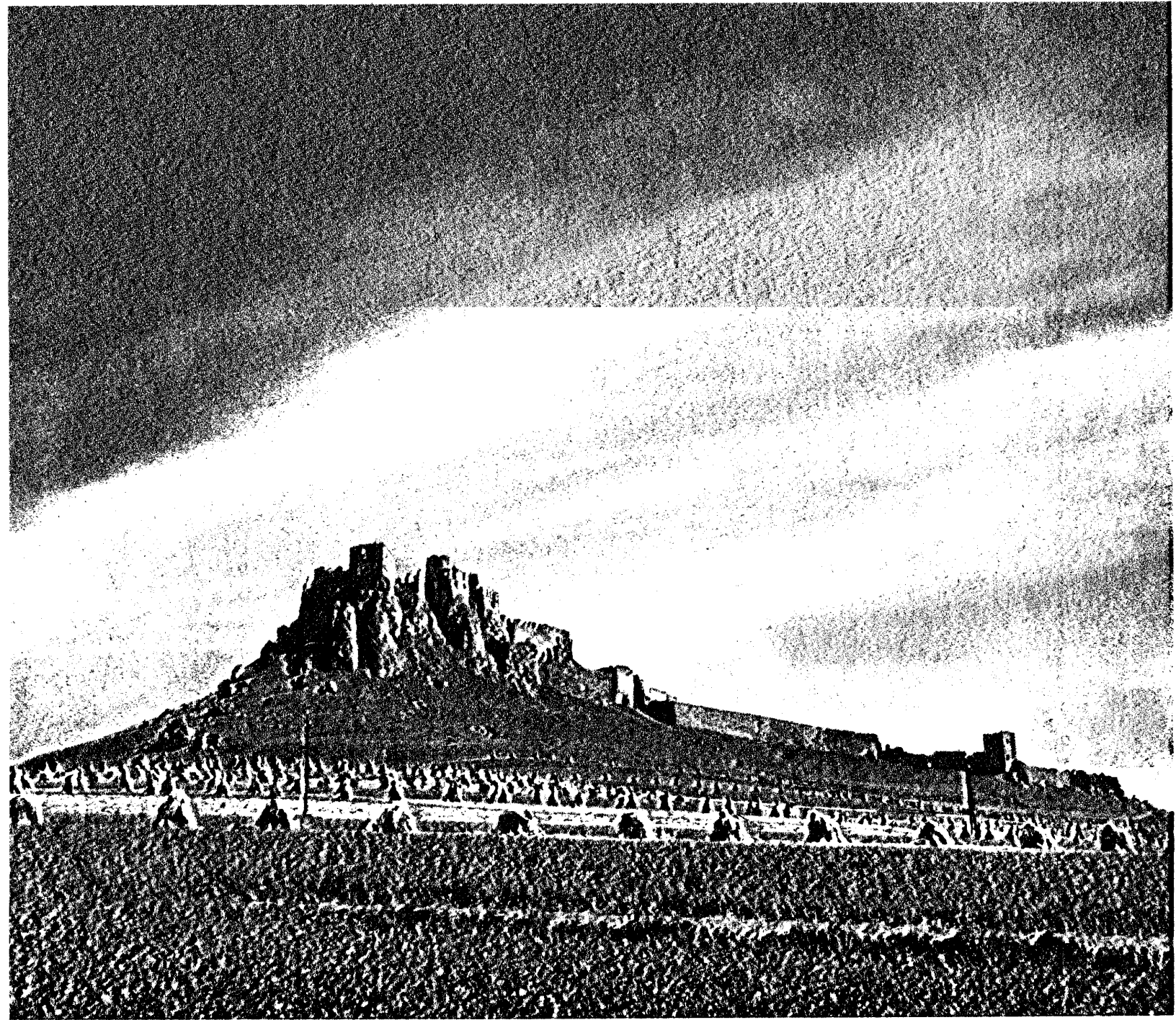


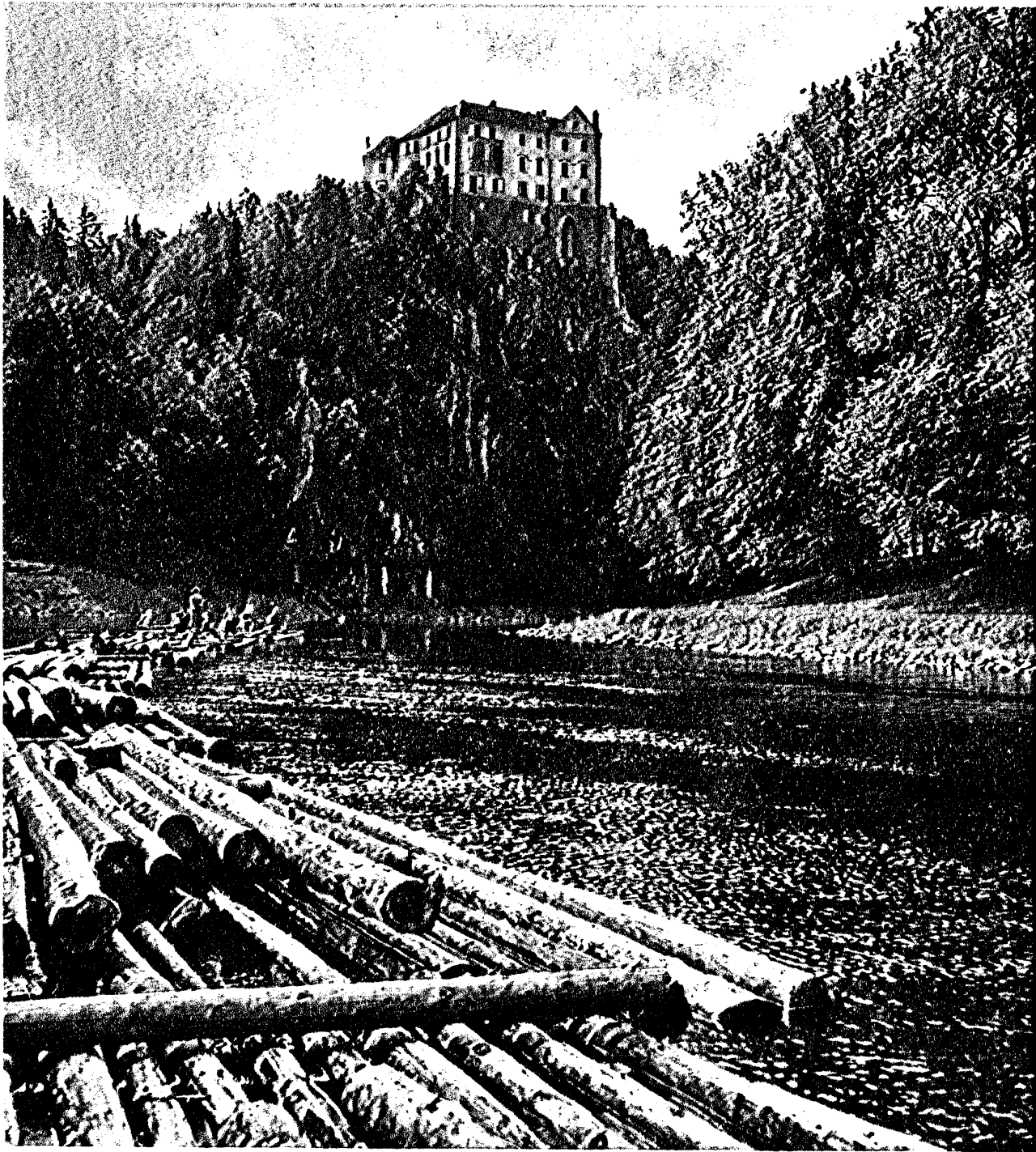




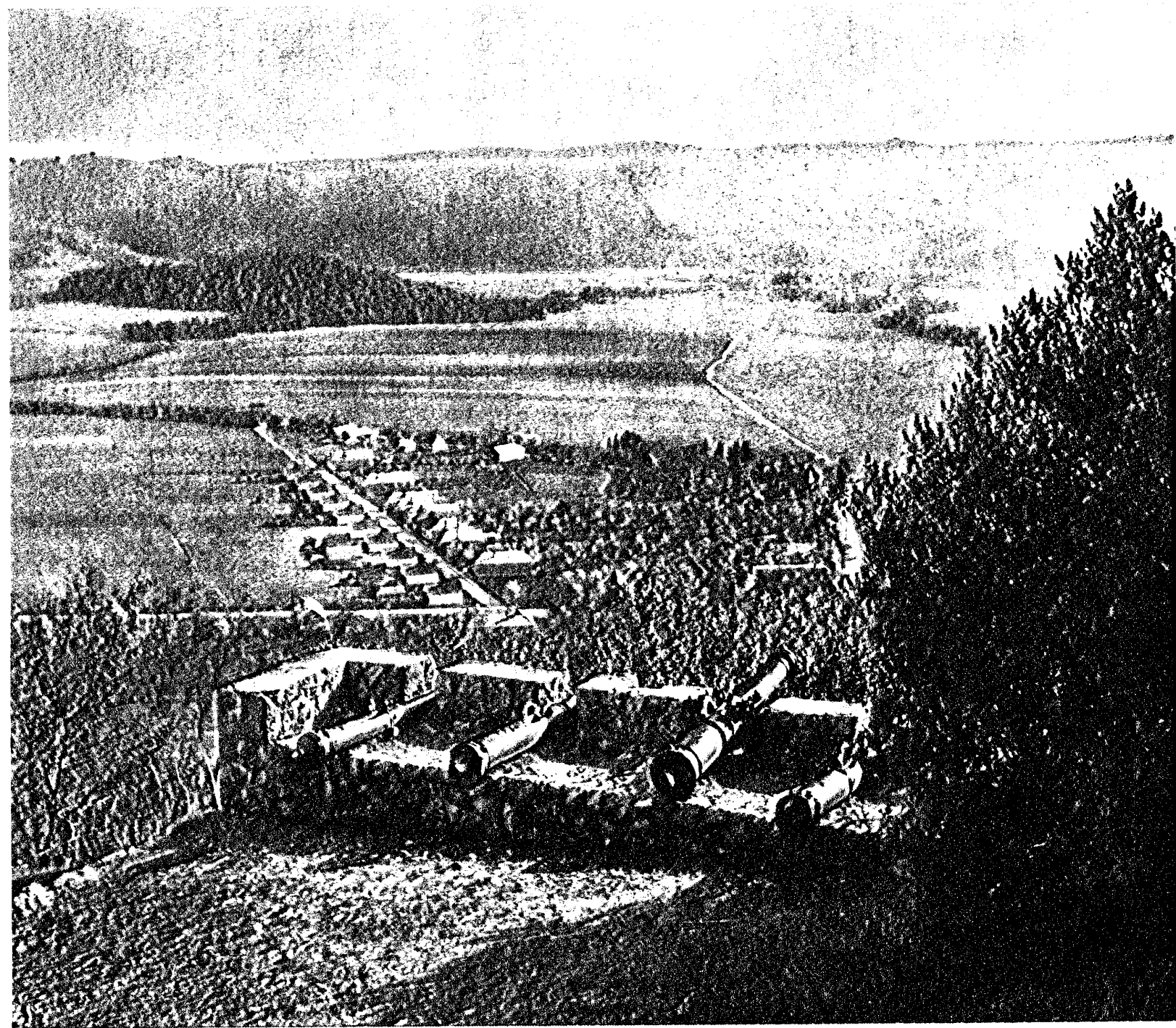


Flesh and blood vies with the stones





...elsewhere it keeps sternly aloof

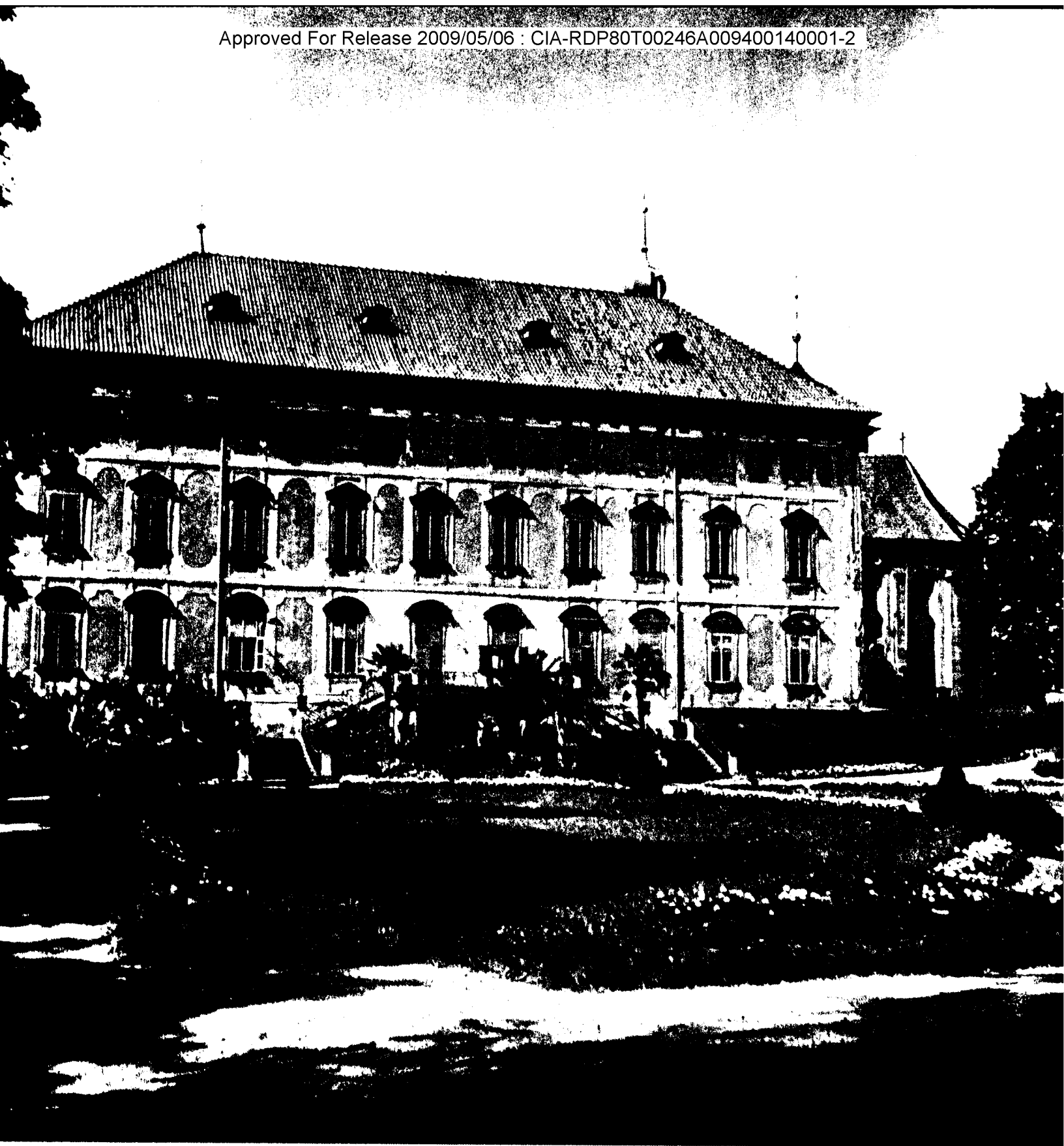


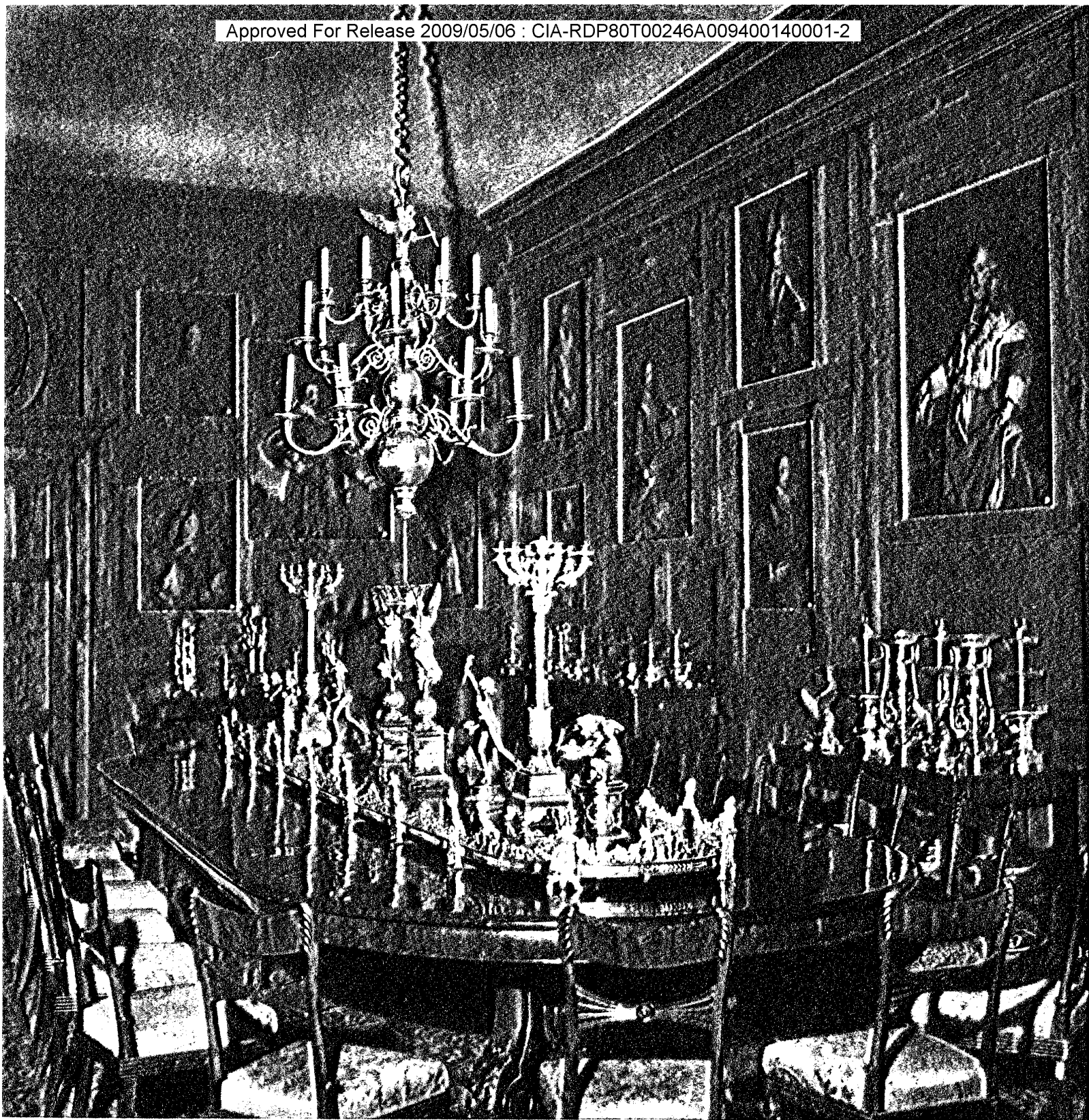


The people—and the nobility

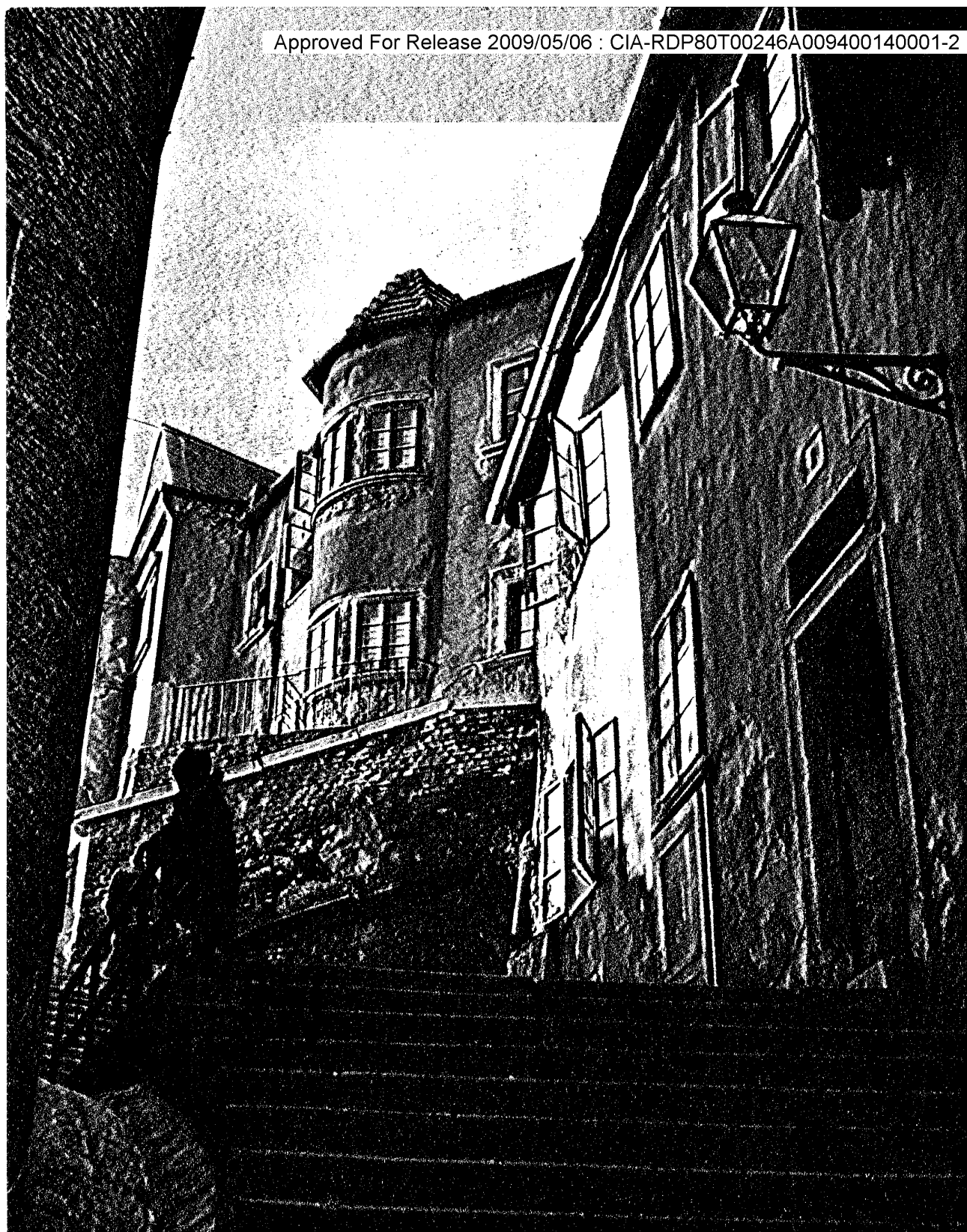






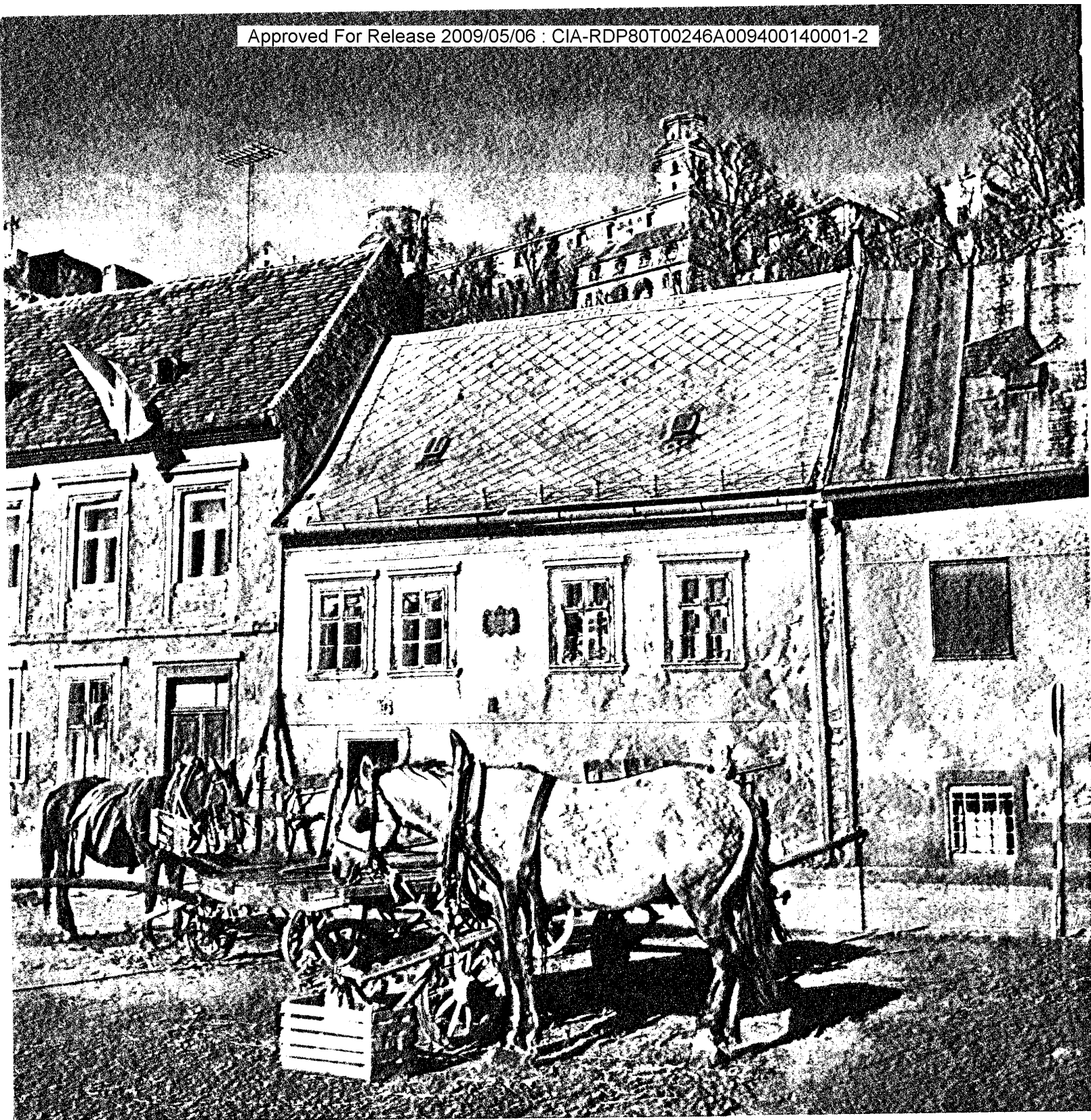


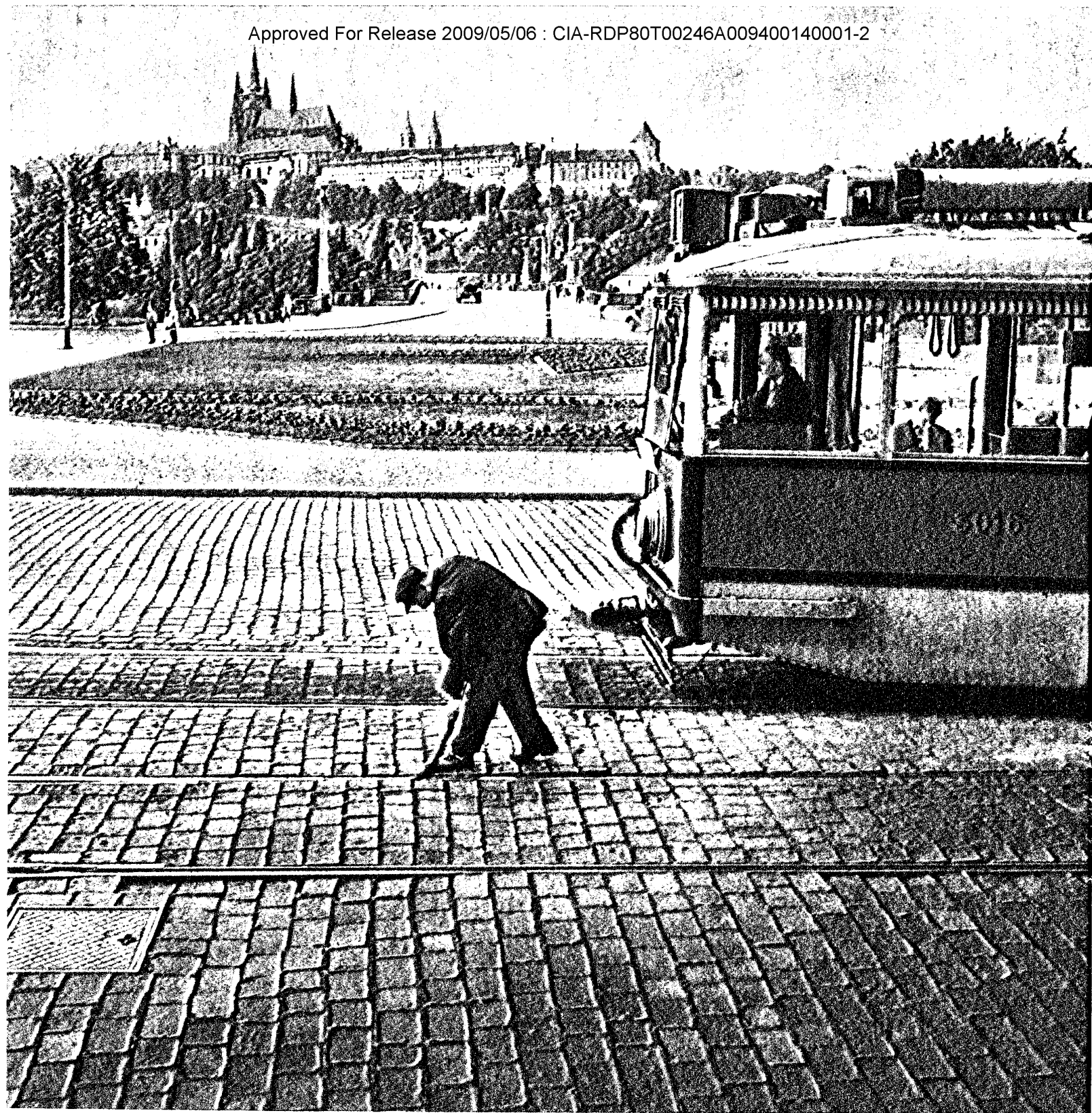
...now a school for taste





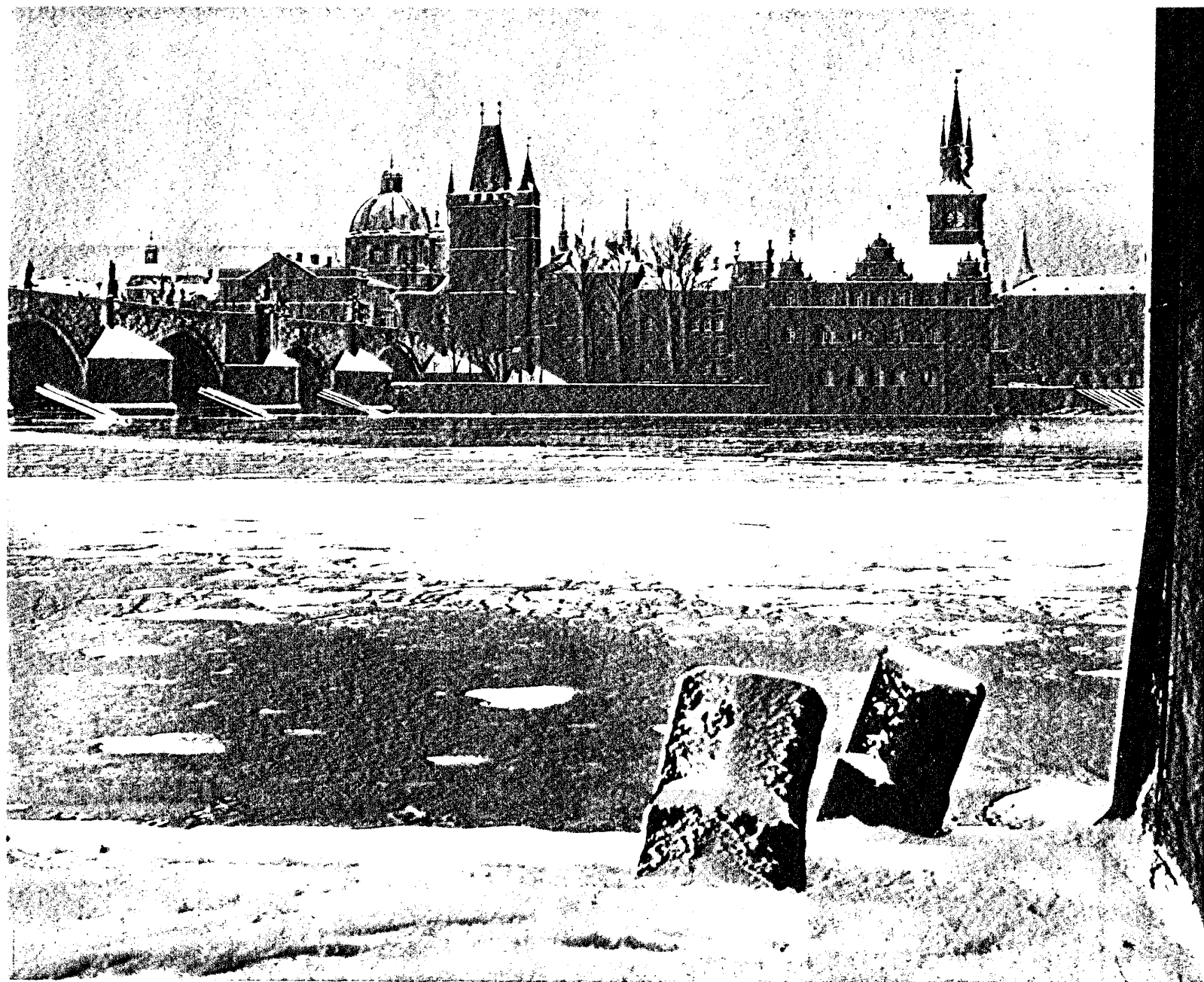
Faith in the future





The Song of Prague—the beauty of everyday

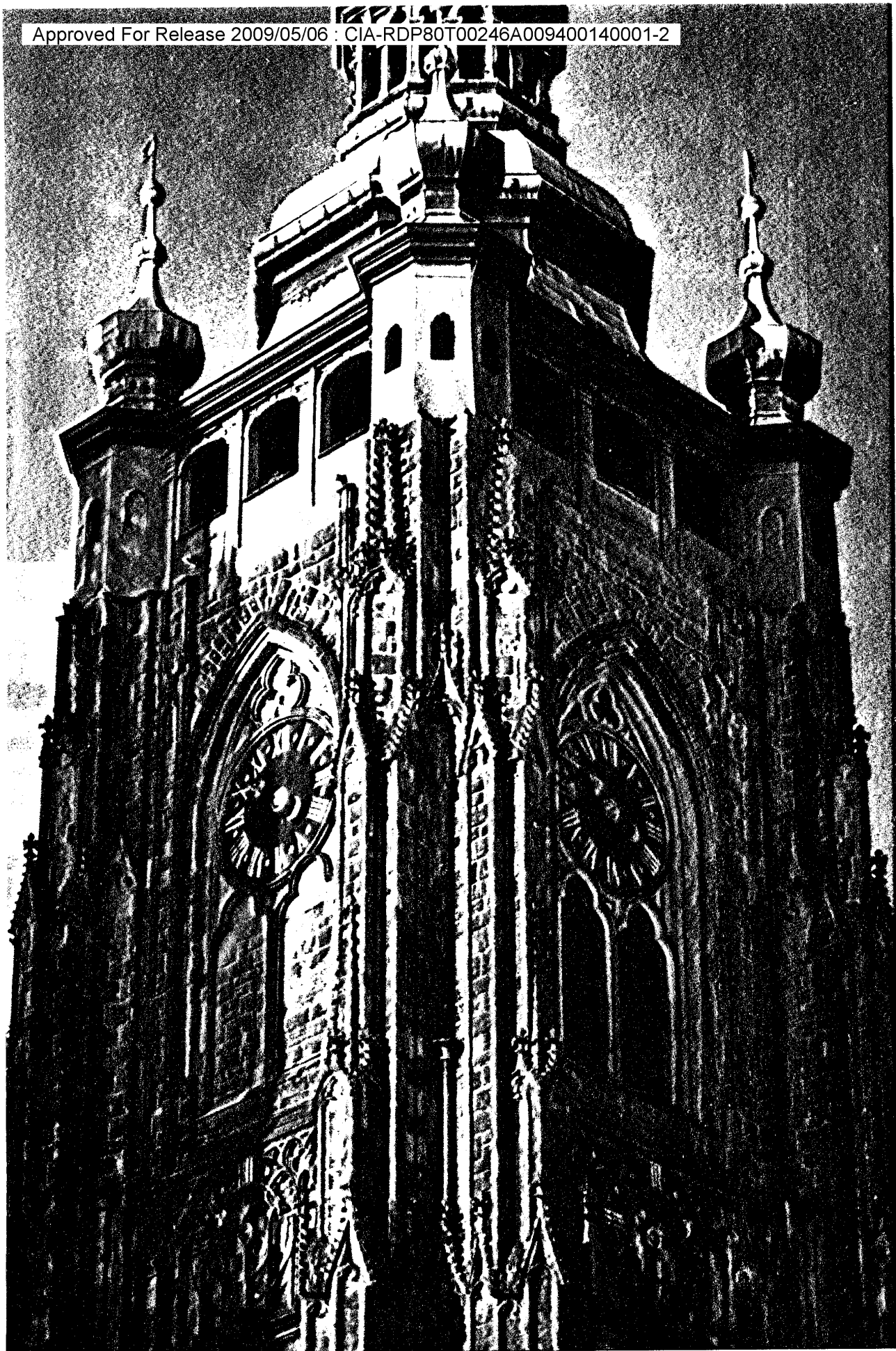




Snowclad Prague—cruel winter

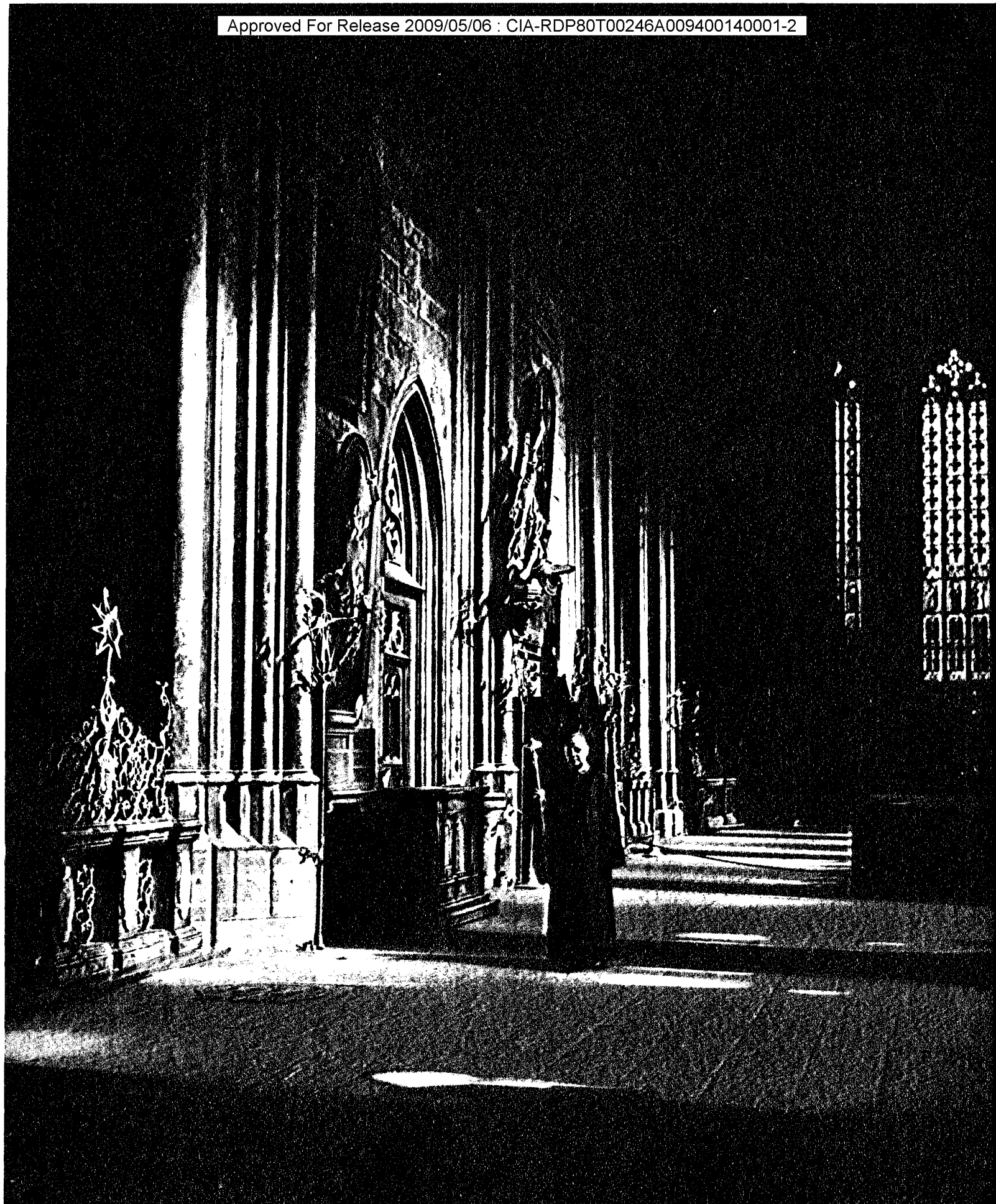


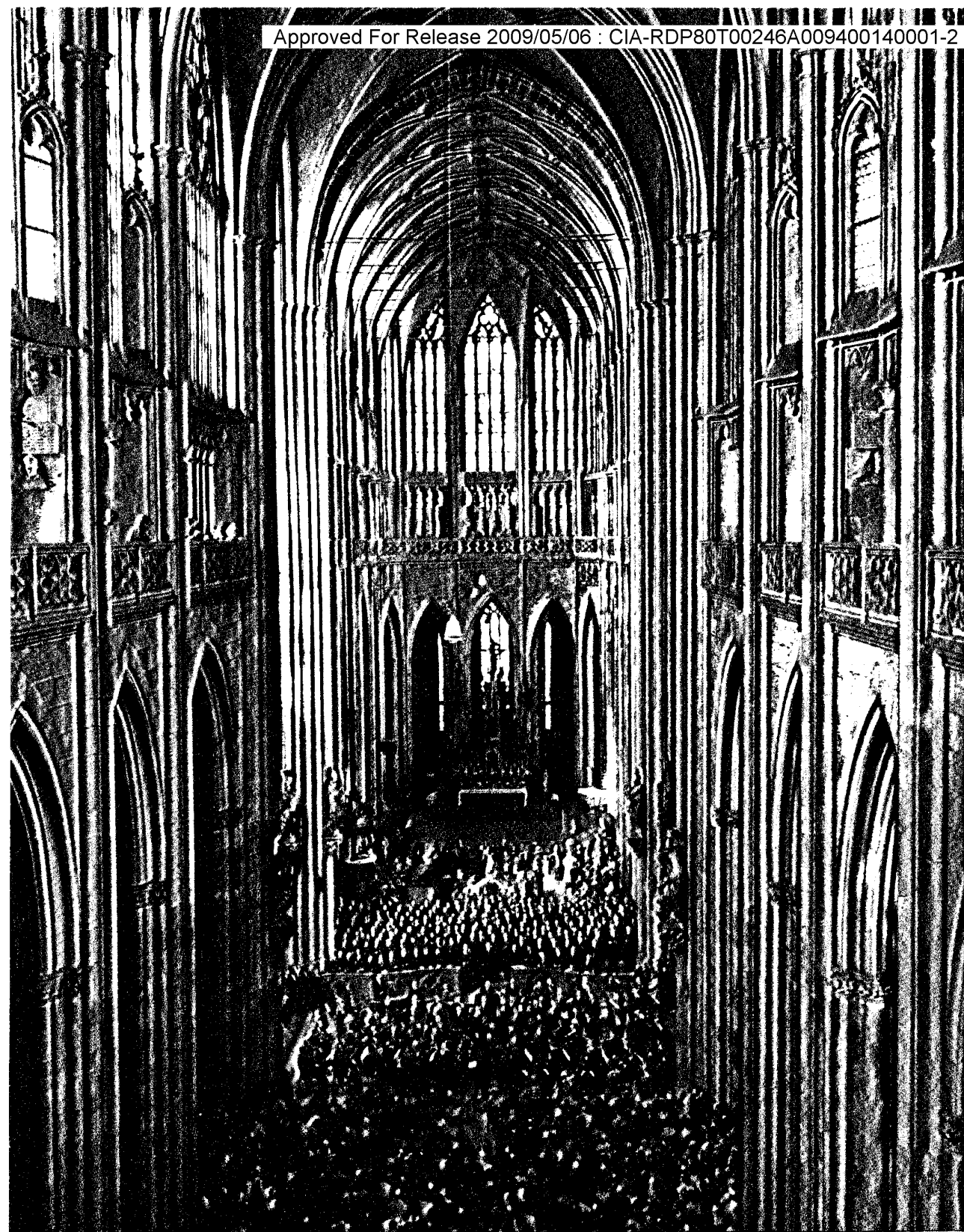
An unguarded moment

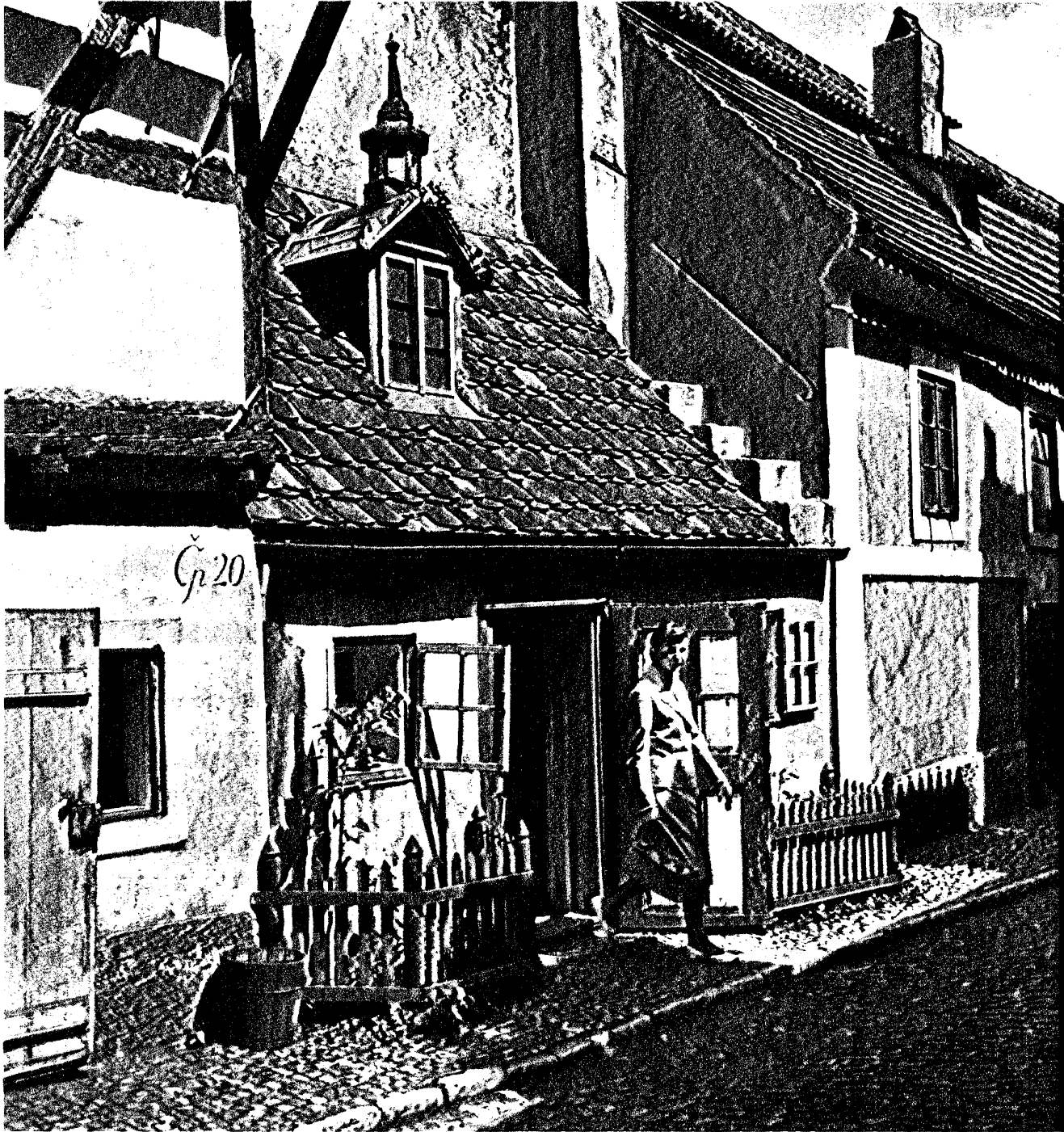


It might be a
child's plaything

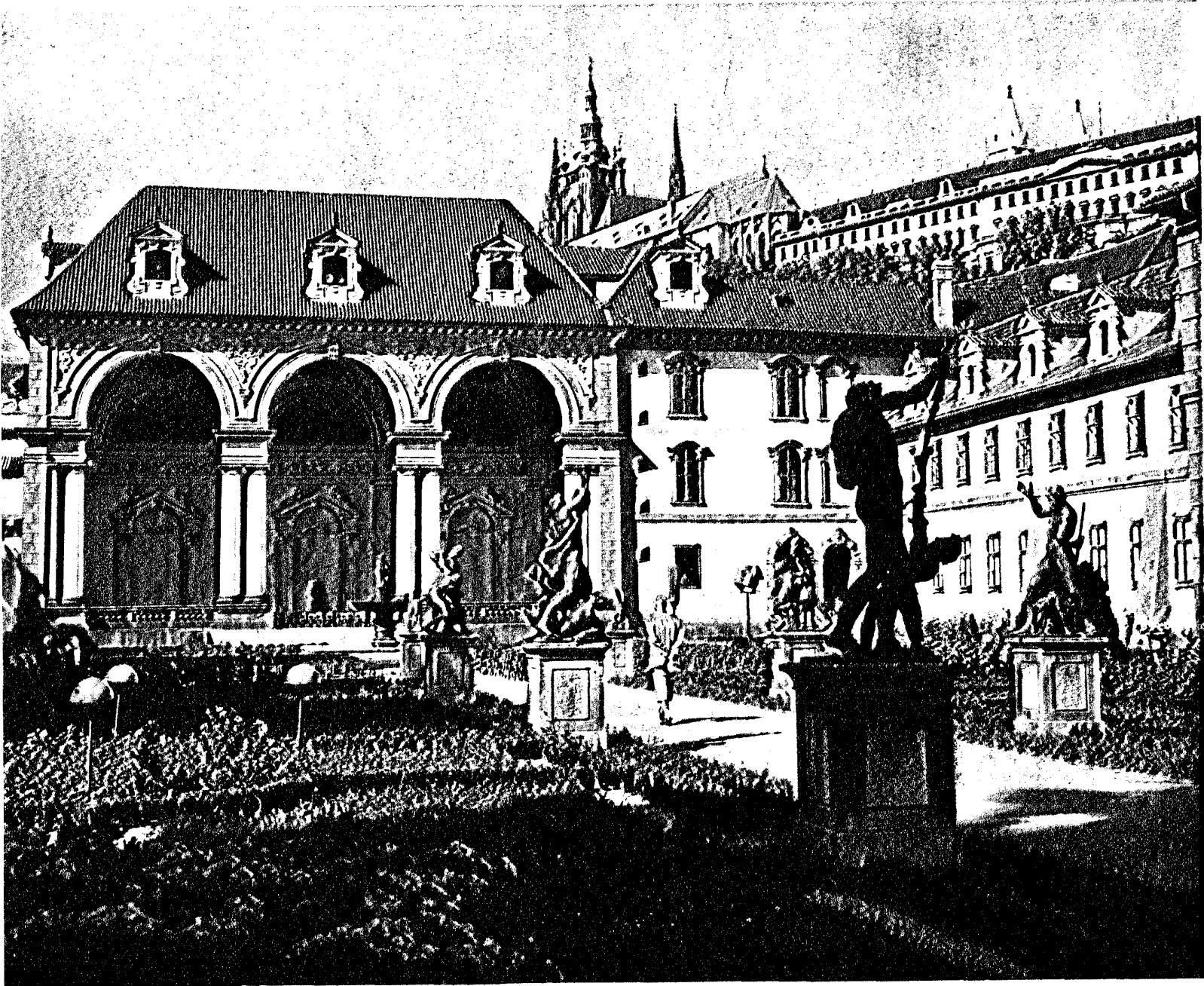






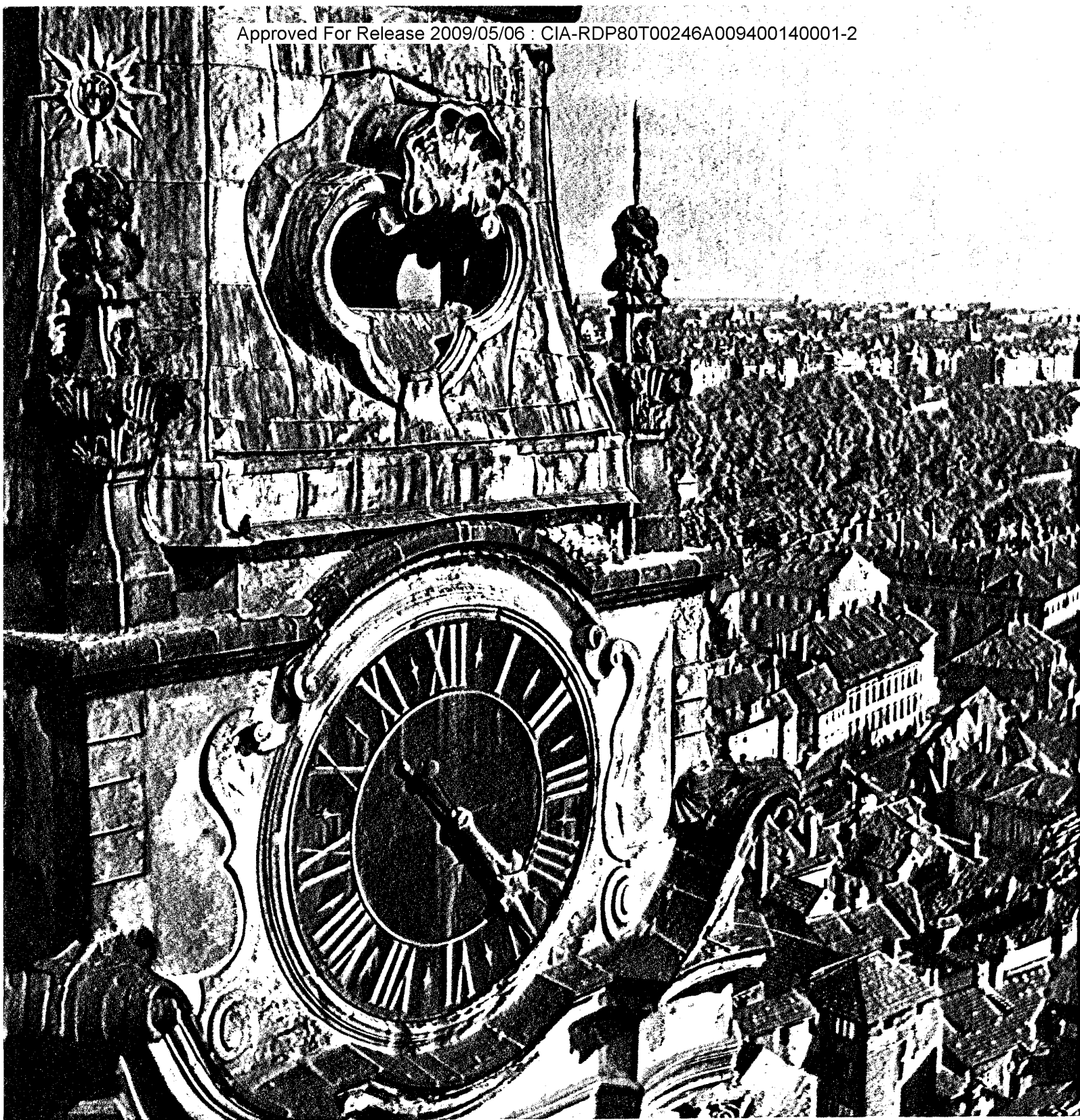


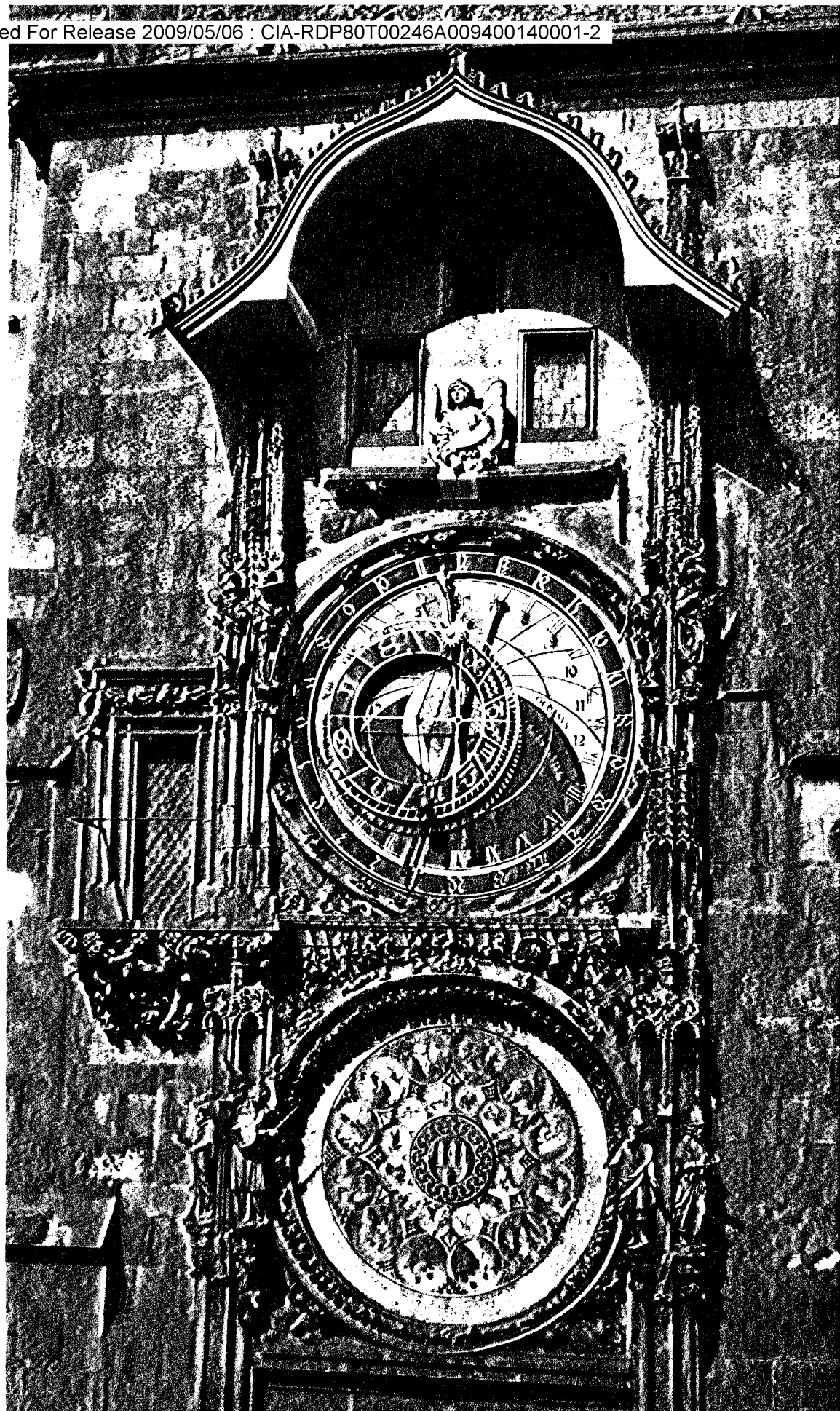
A street from the Middle Ages with a modern smile





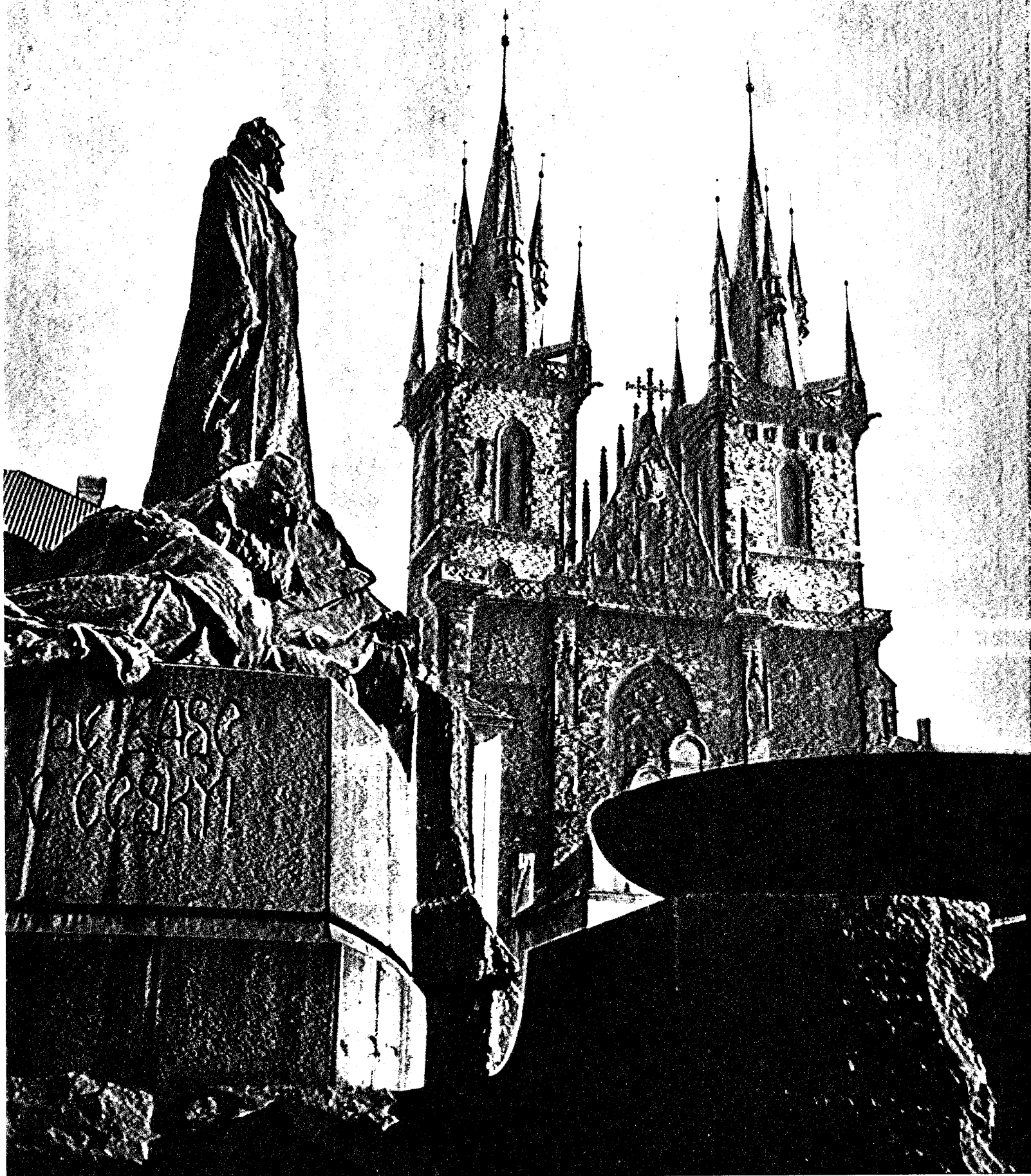
Mute conversation

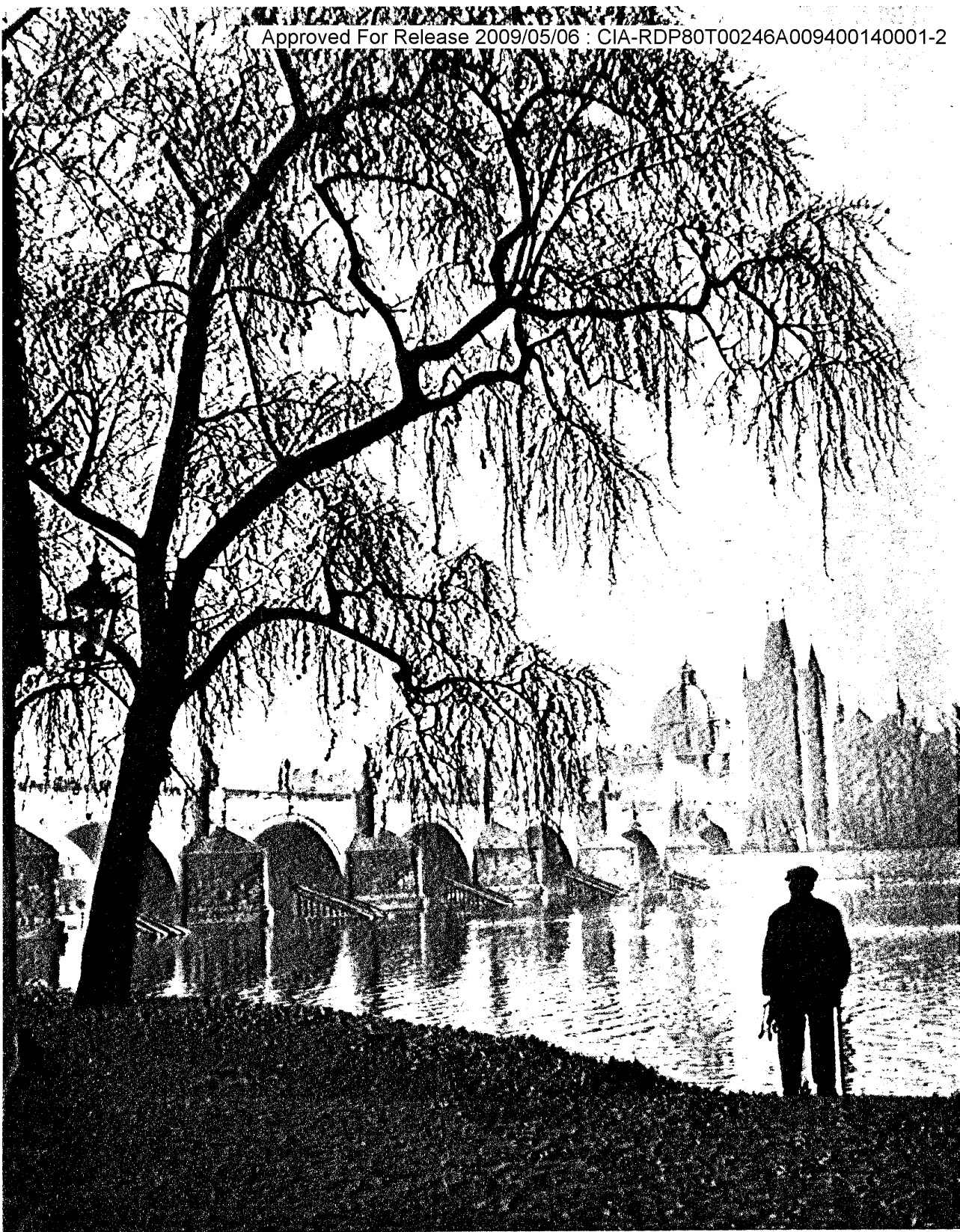




A treatise on eternity
from the Middle Ages

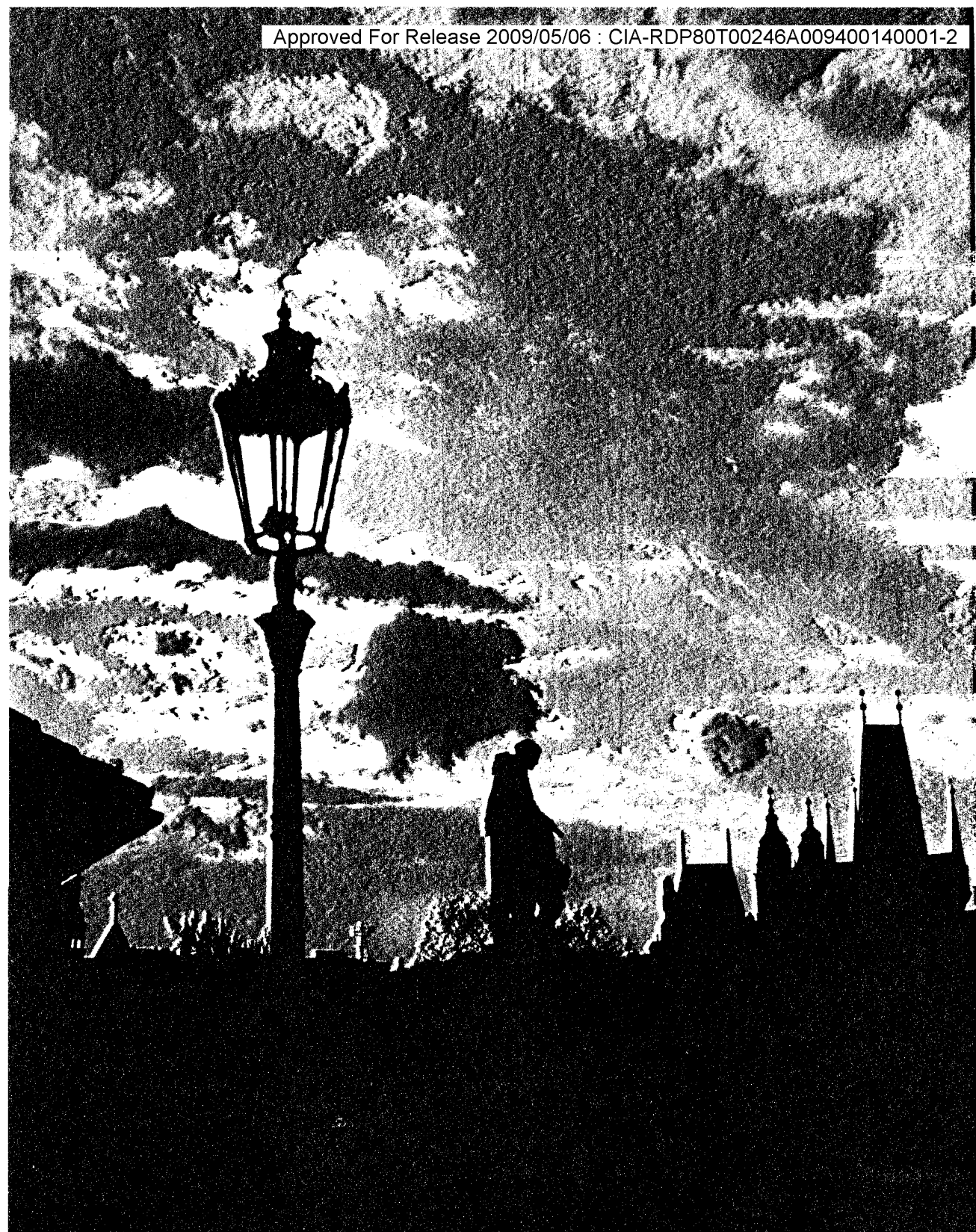


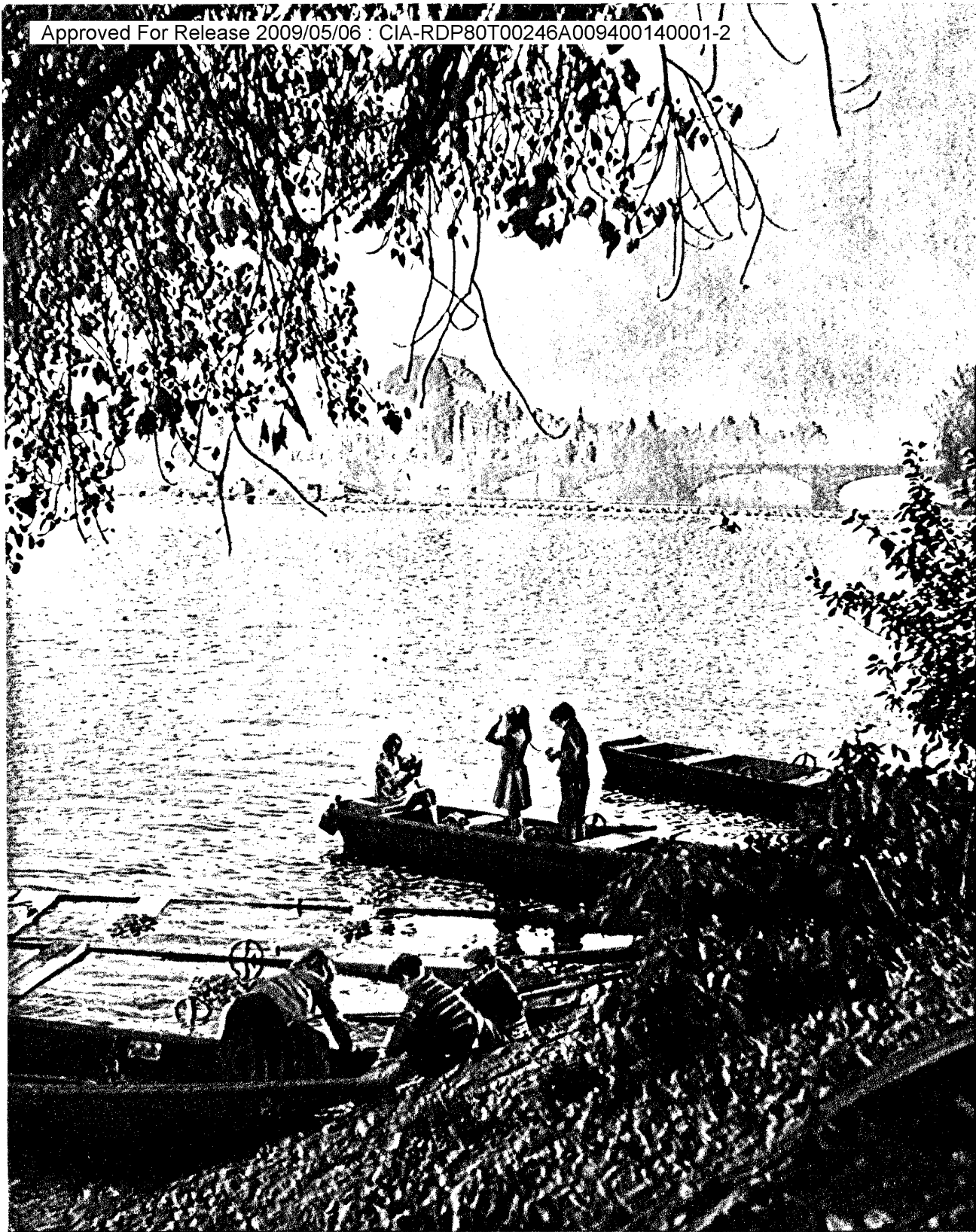




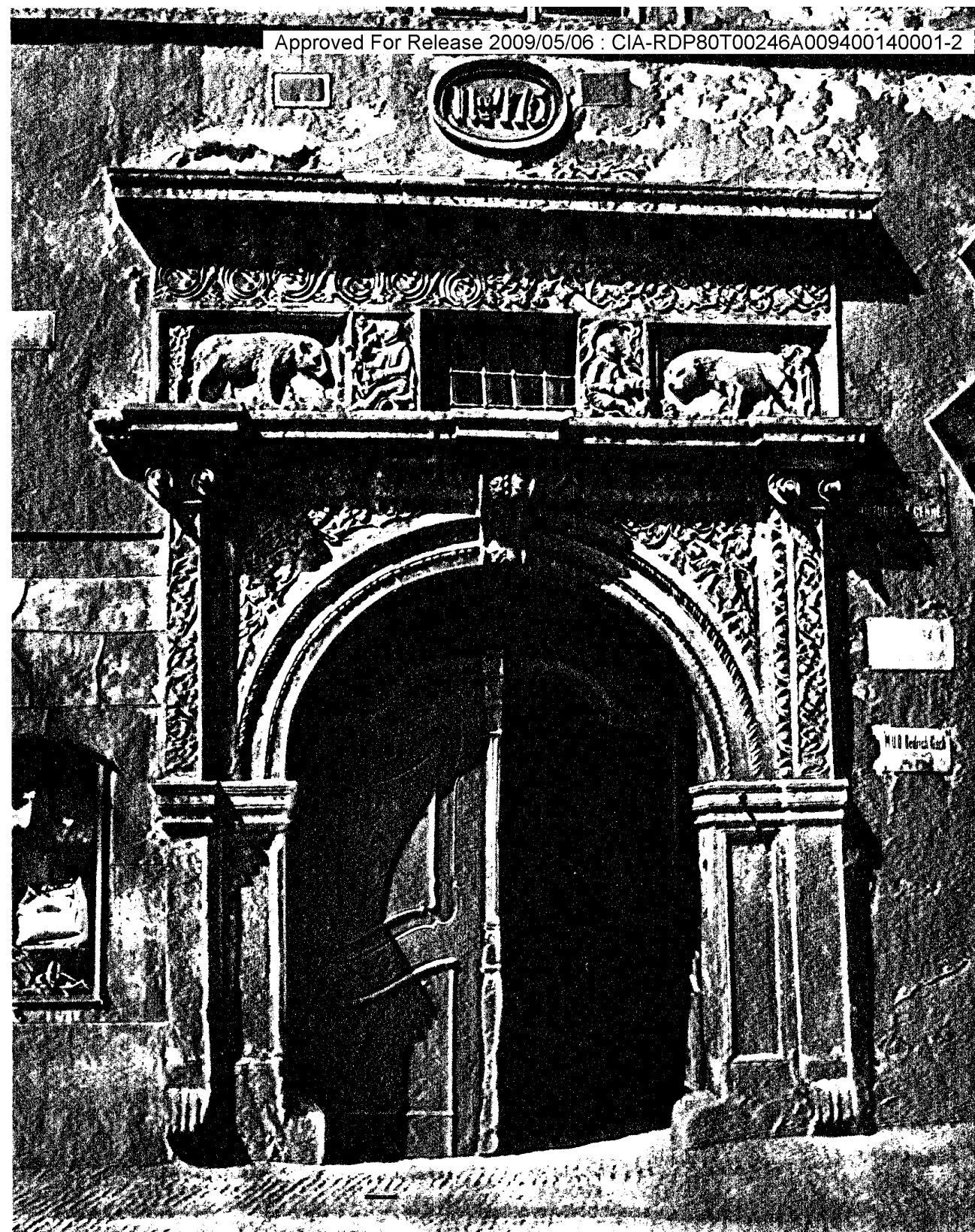


The boat and the town at peace

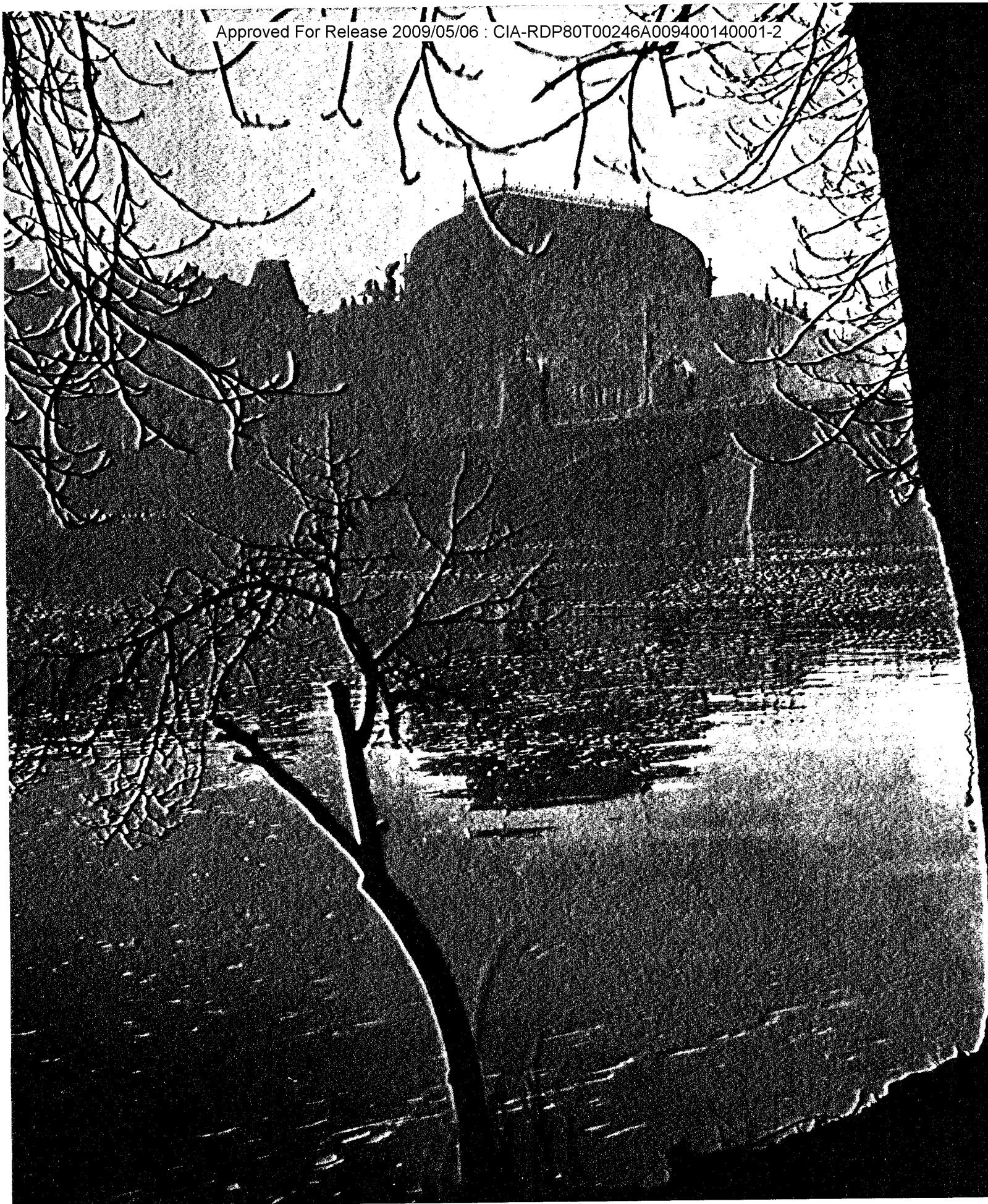




The Vitava has the attraction of the sea for children

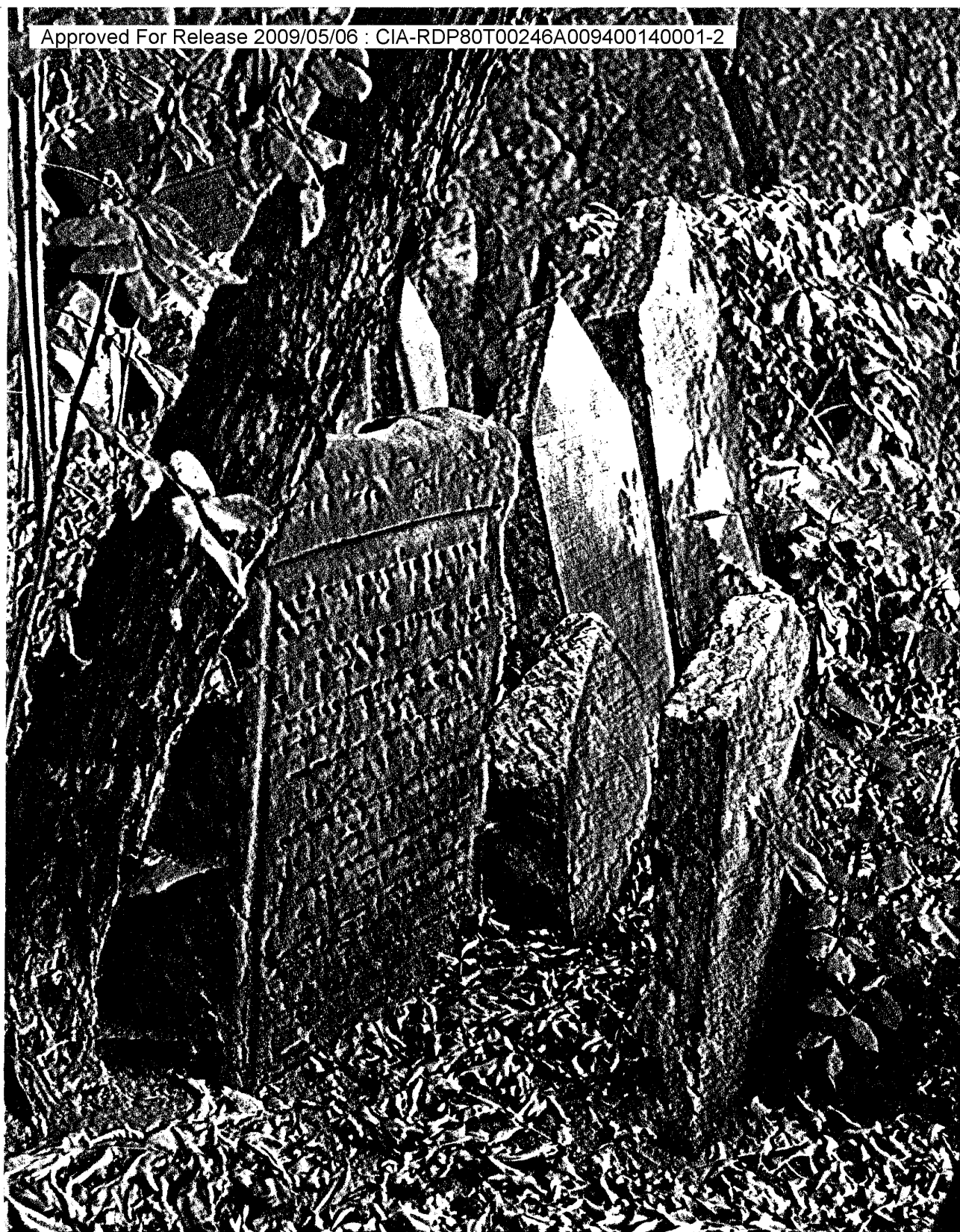


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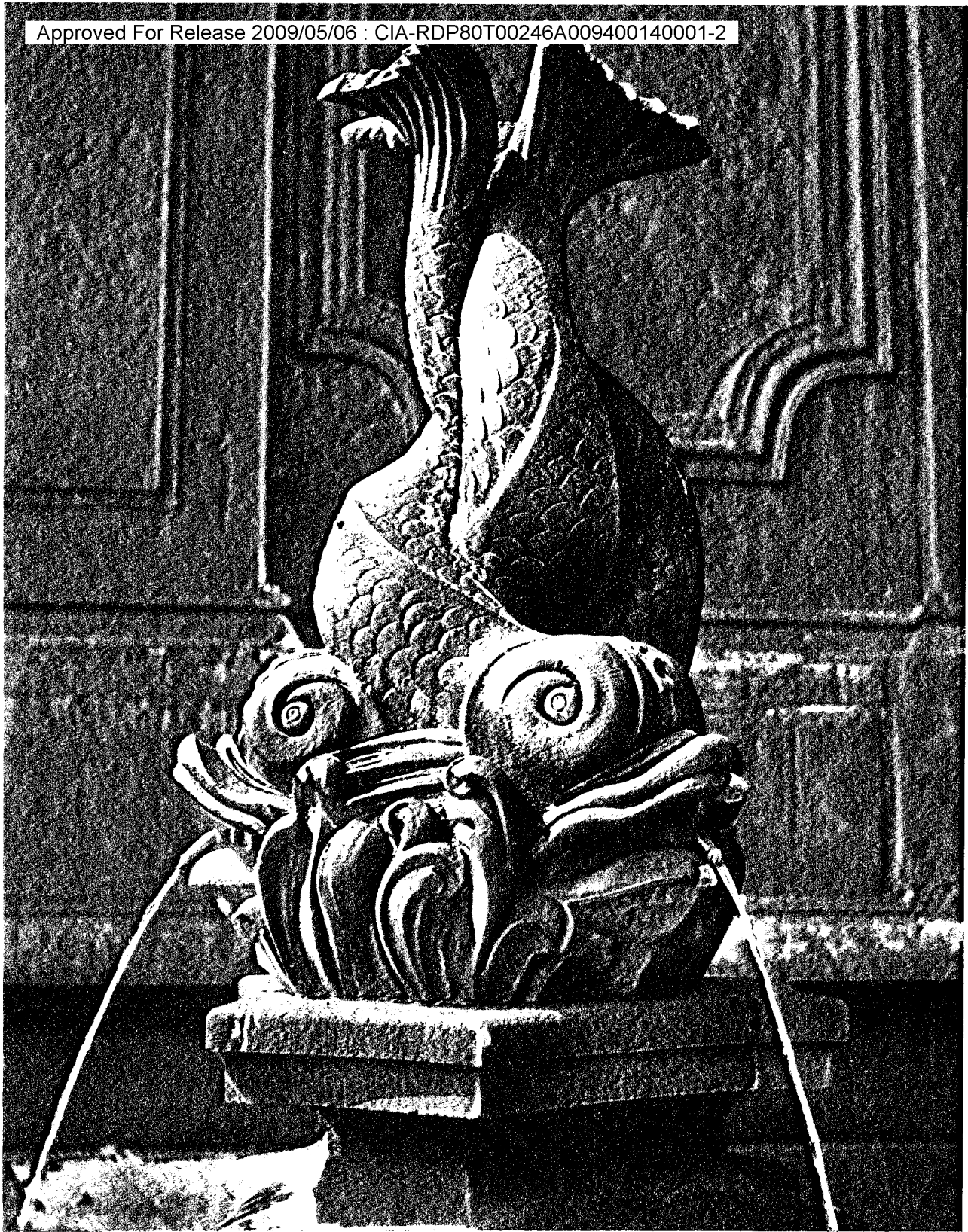
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Silent graves





Praise of the water elements

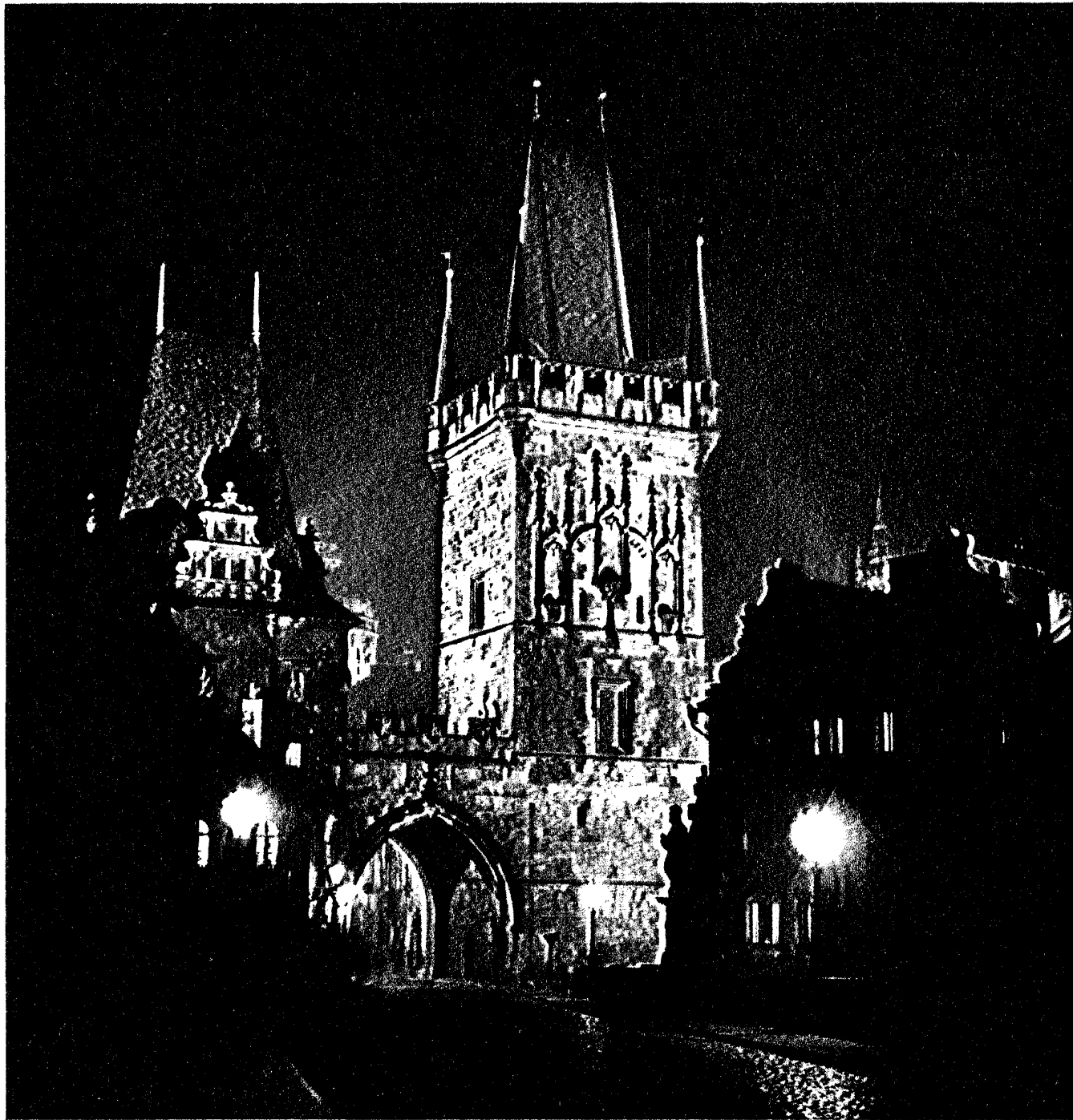


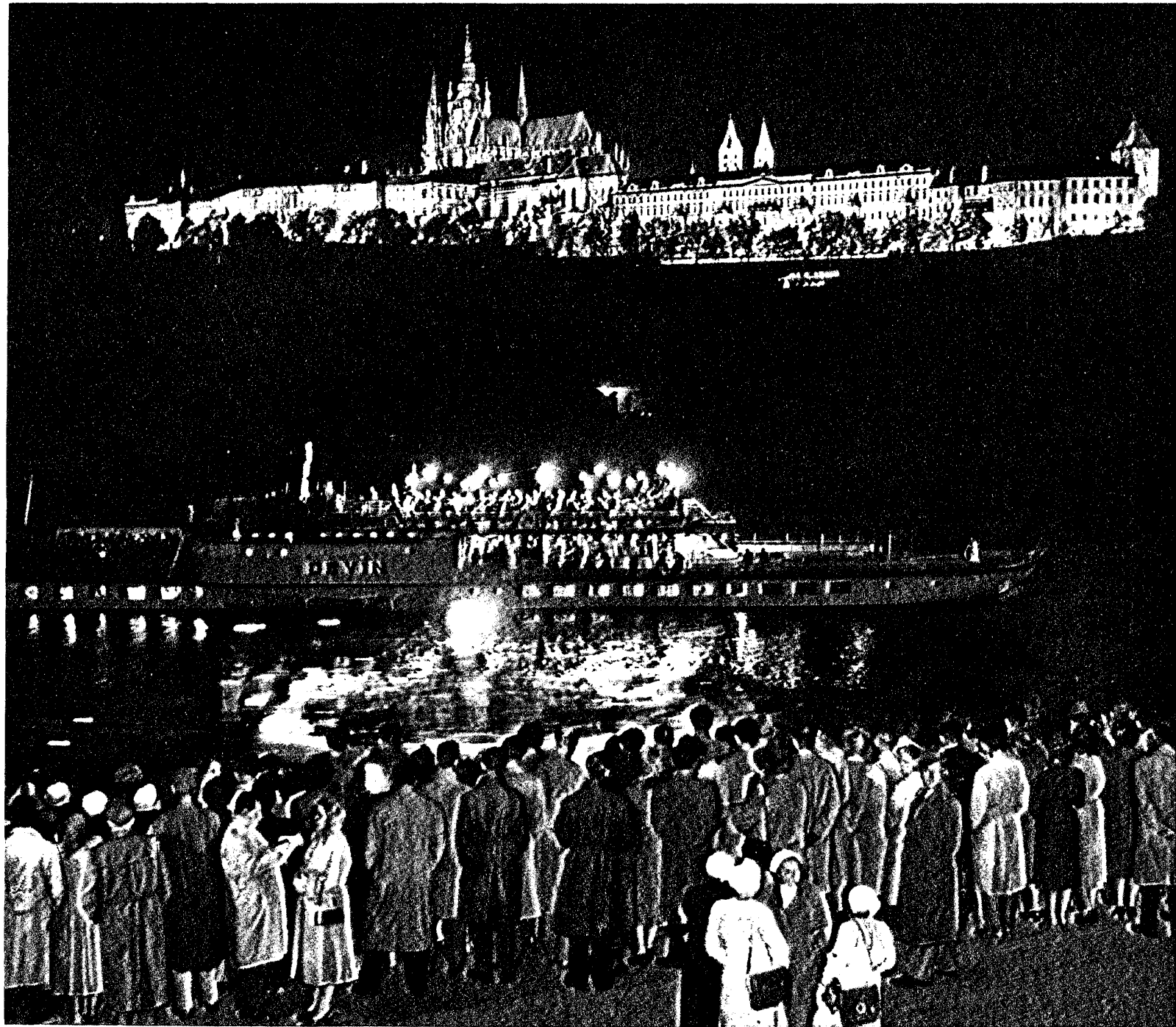


The end of the day

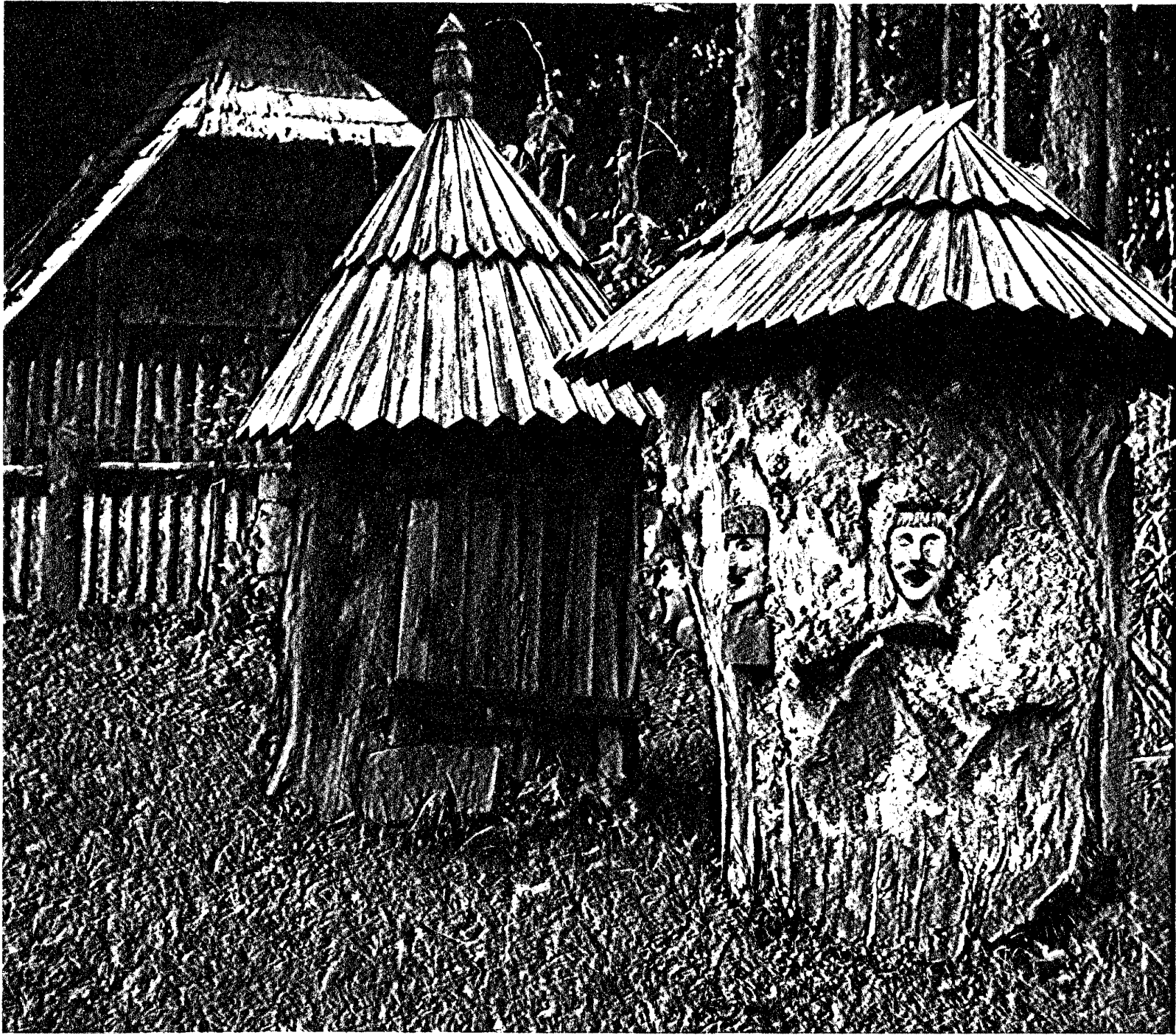








Three steps on the path to perfection





The face of the people





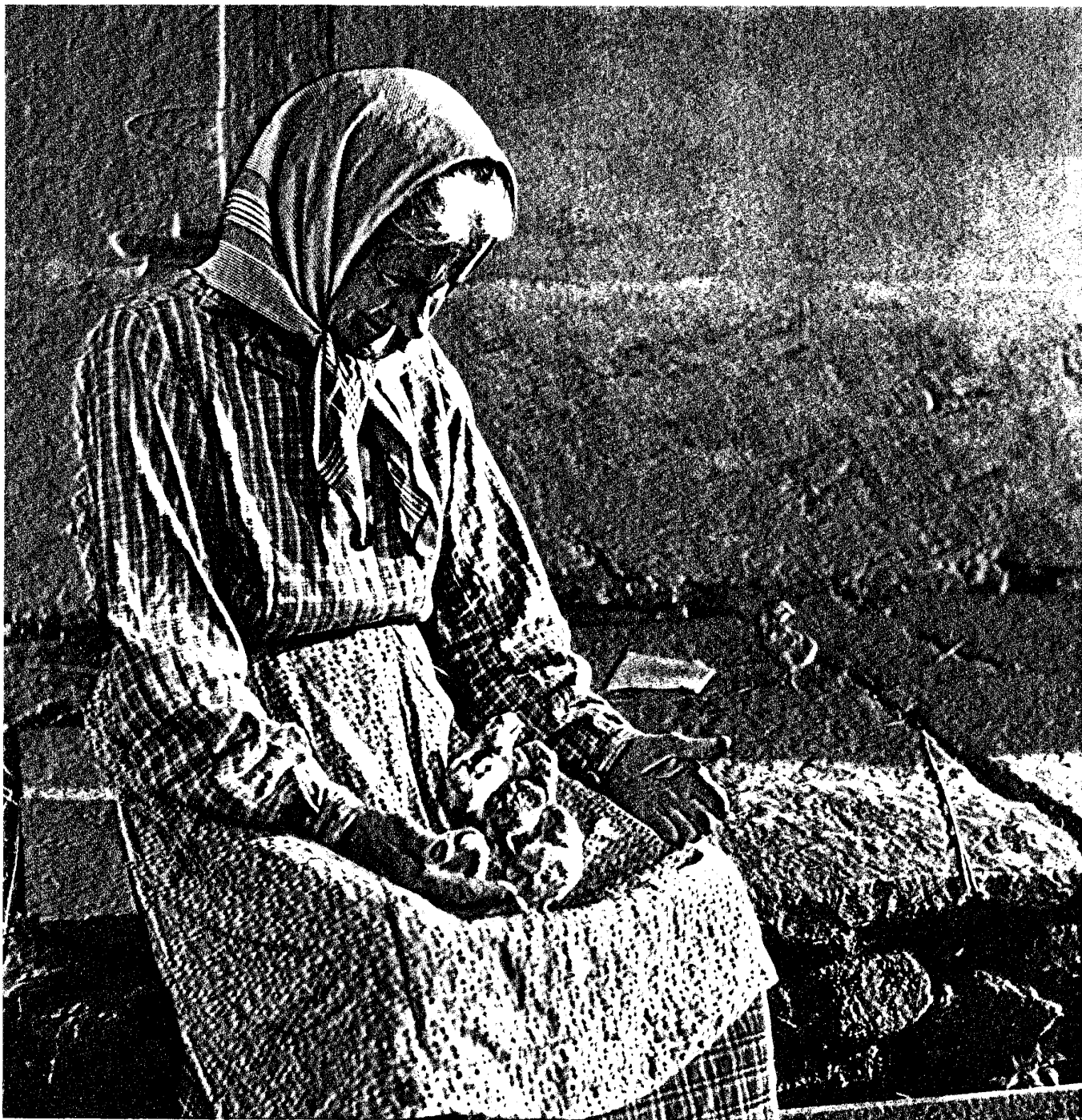
On the road to bread



The art of rejoicing



The children of the earth





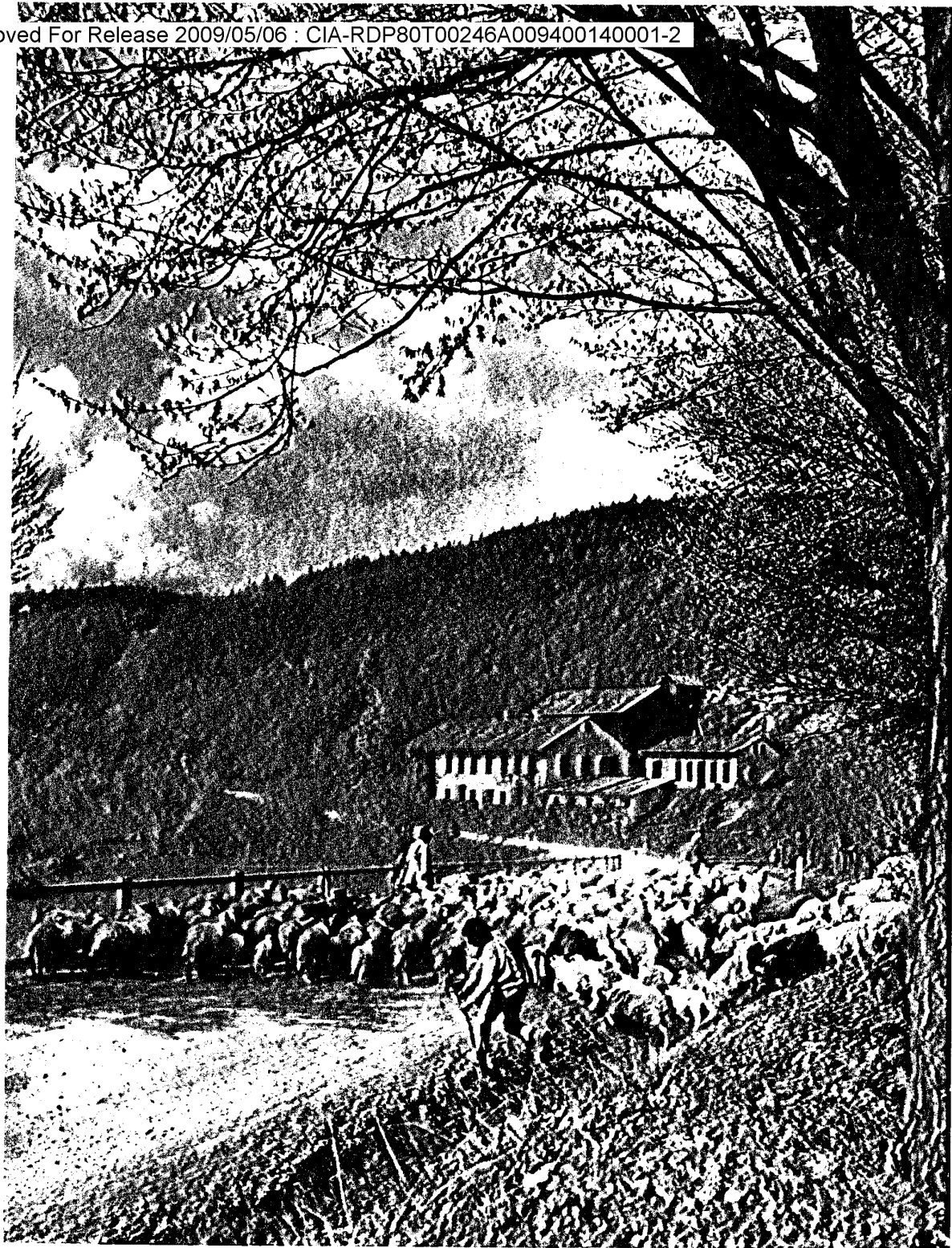
Vineyard without Dionysos





Plenty





An ancient tale

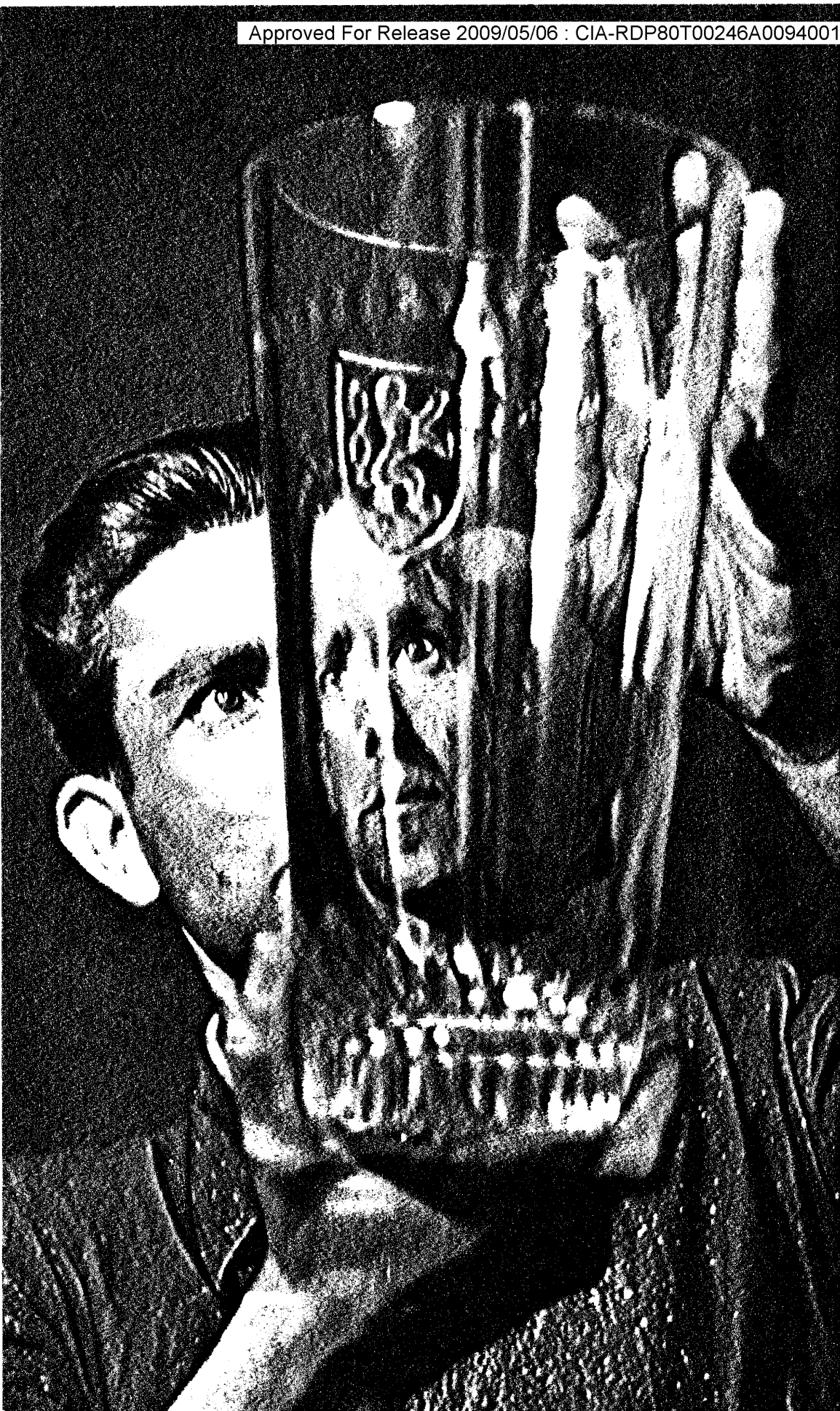




...and the beerdrinker's too

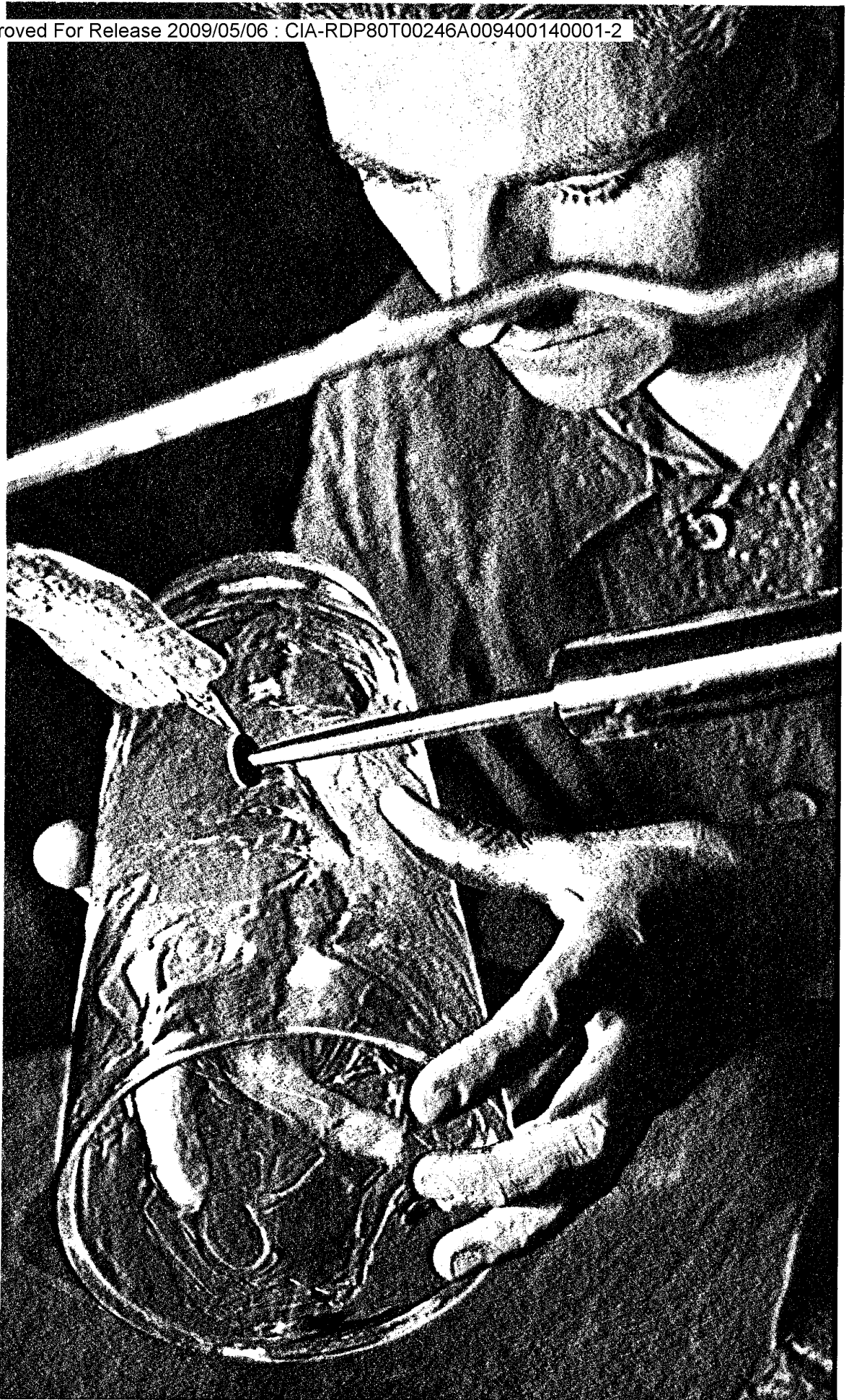






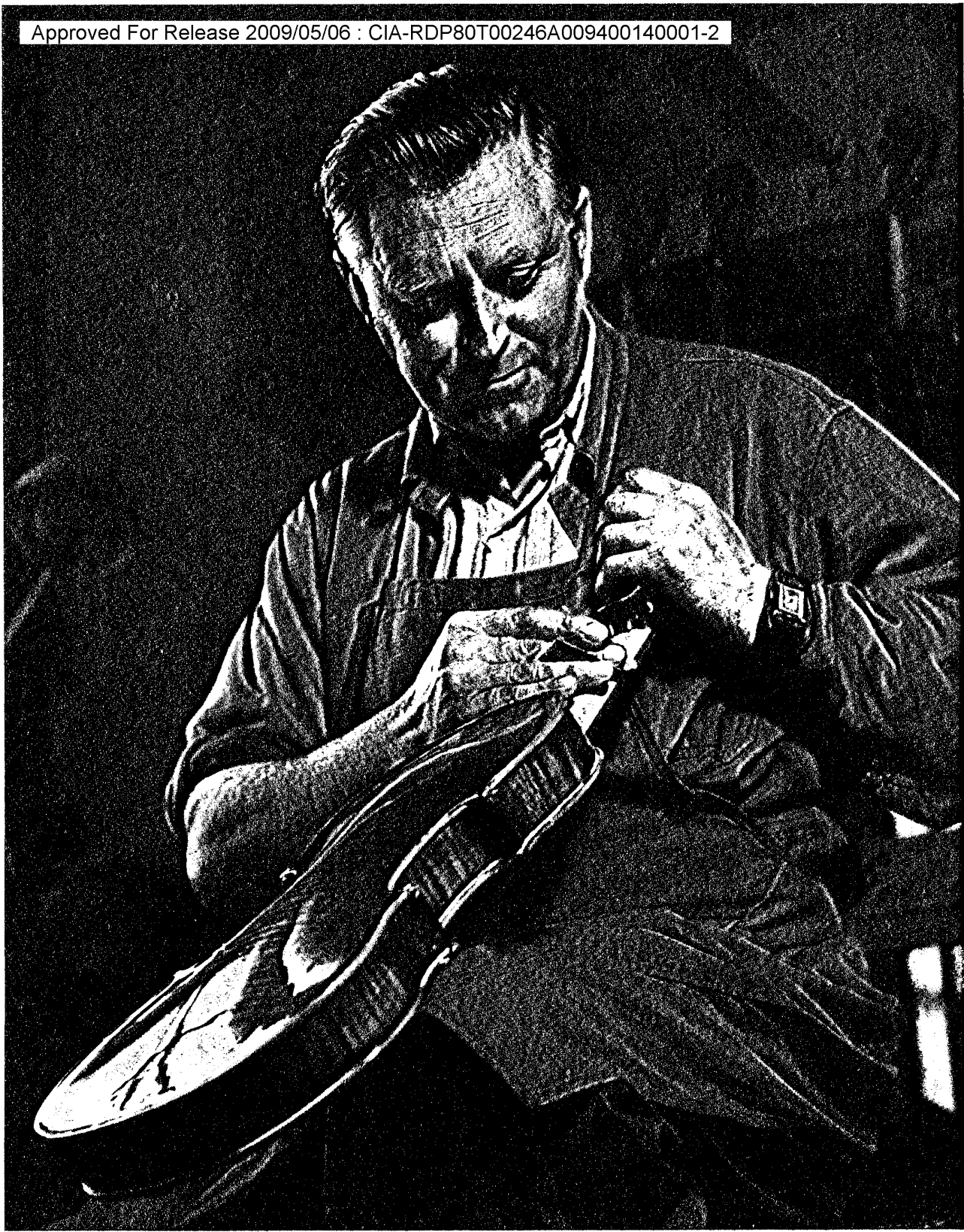
Fragile poetry

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...and prose





The one for whom there is no applause



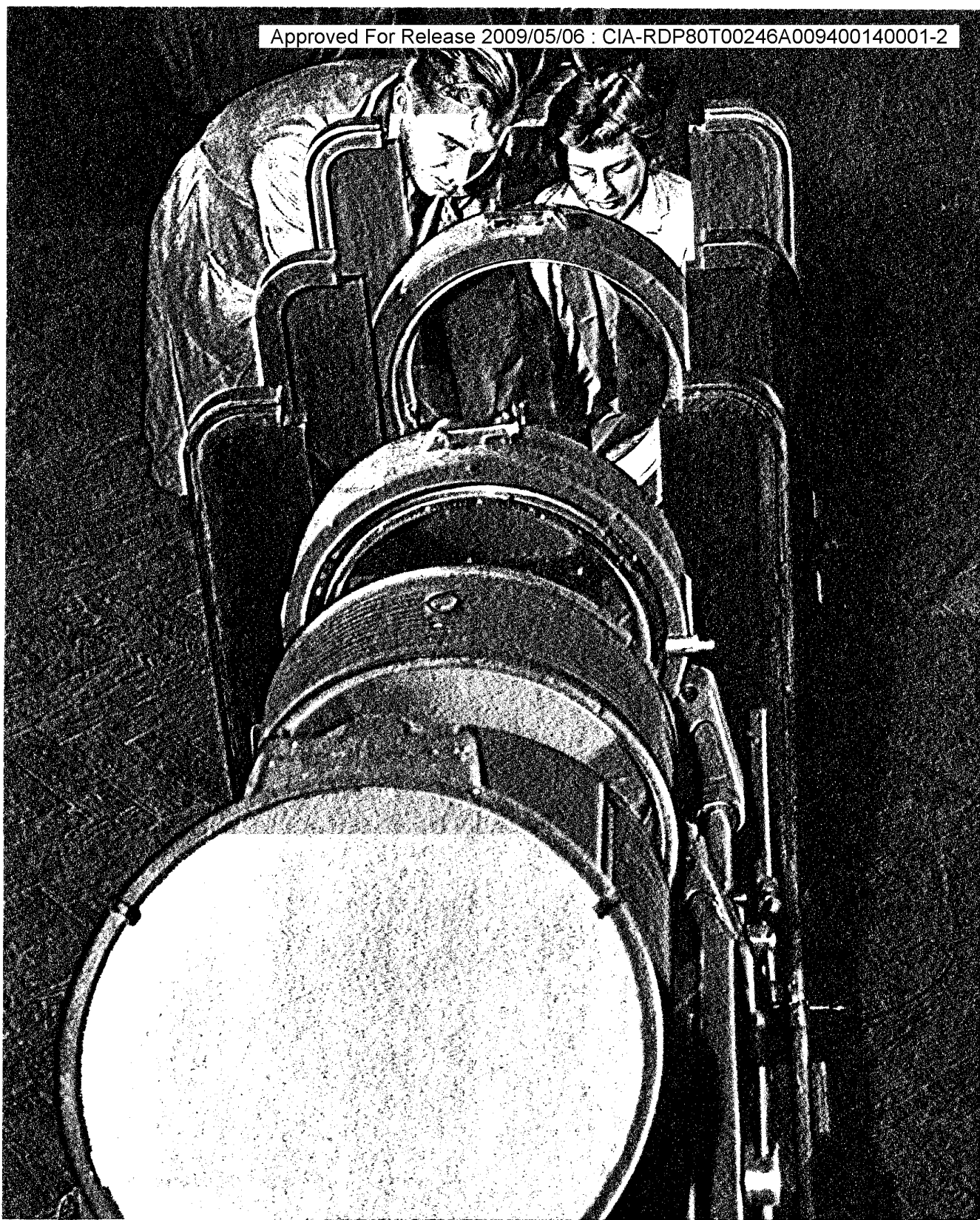


Thinking of a silk dress?



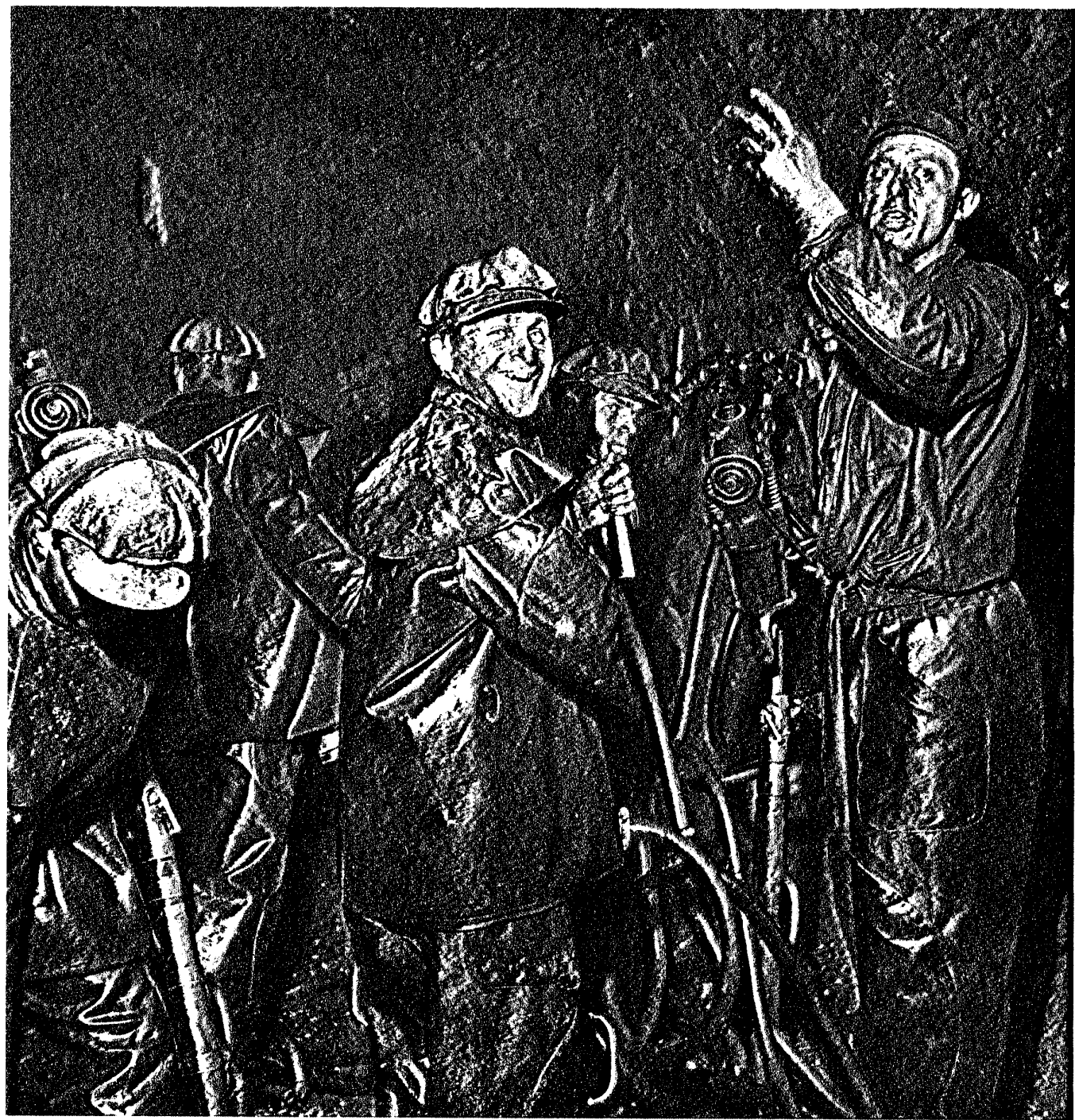


Sober preparations for glittering charm



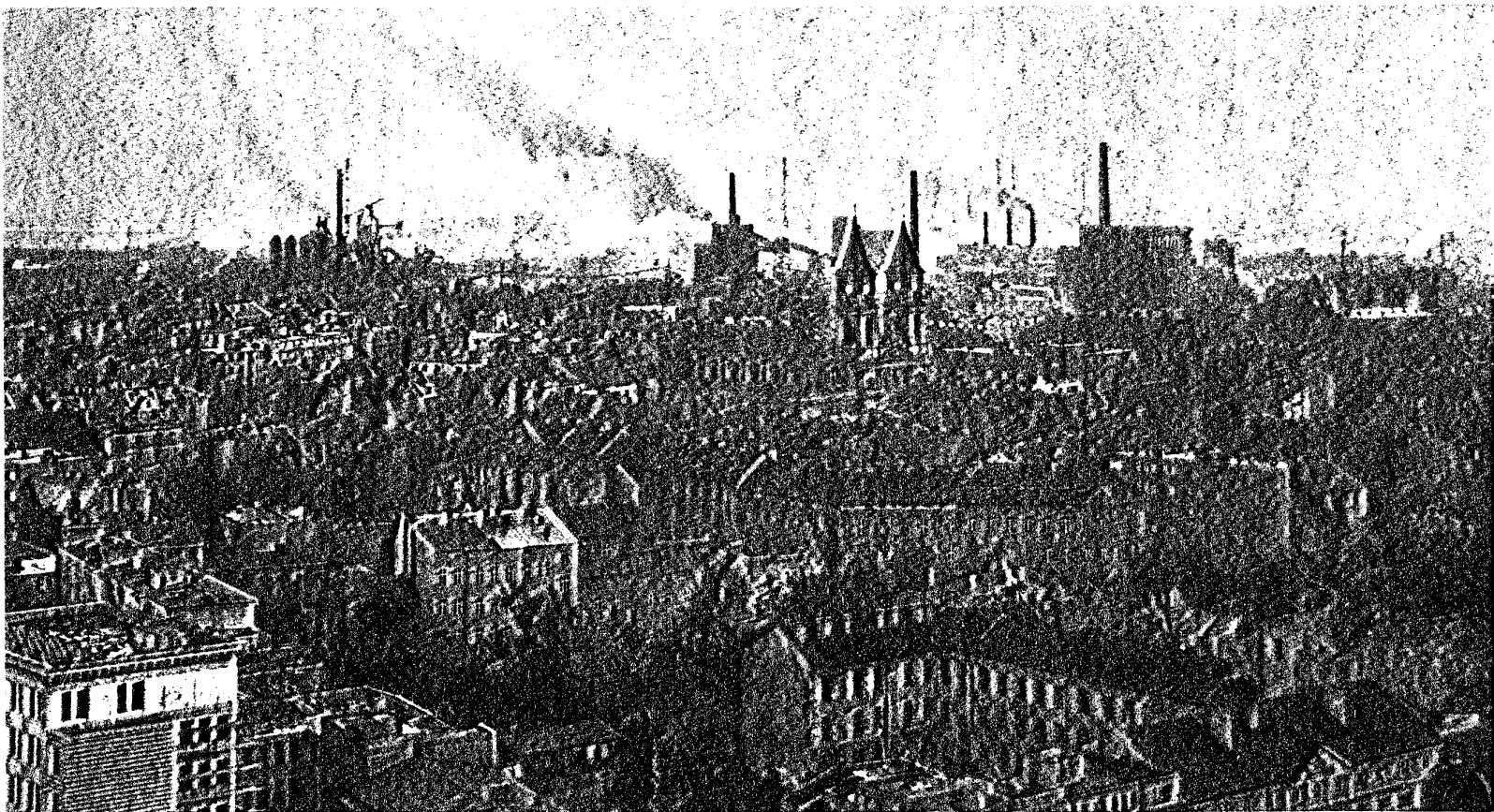


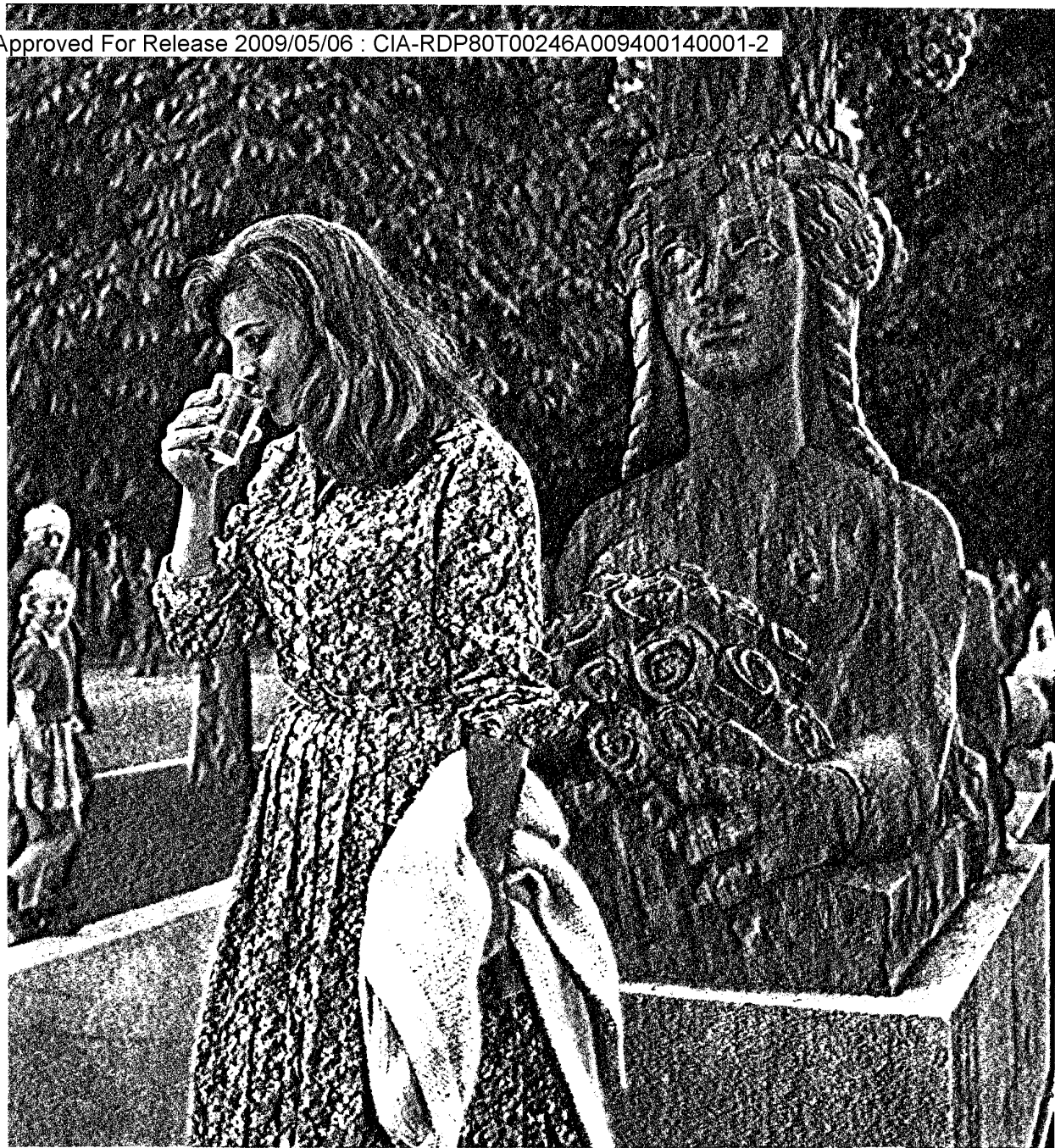
...and the pleasant





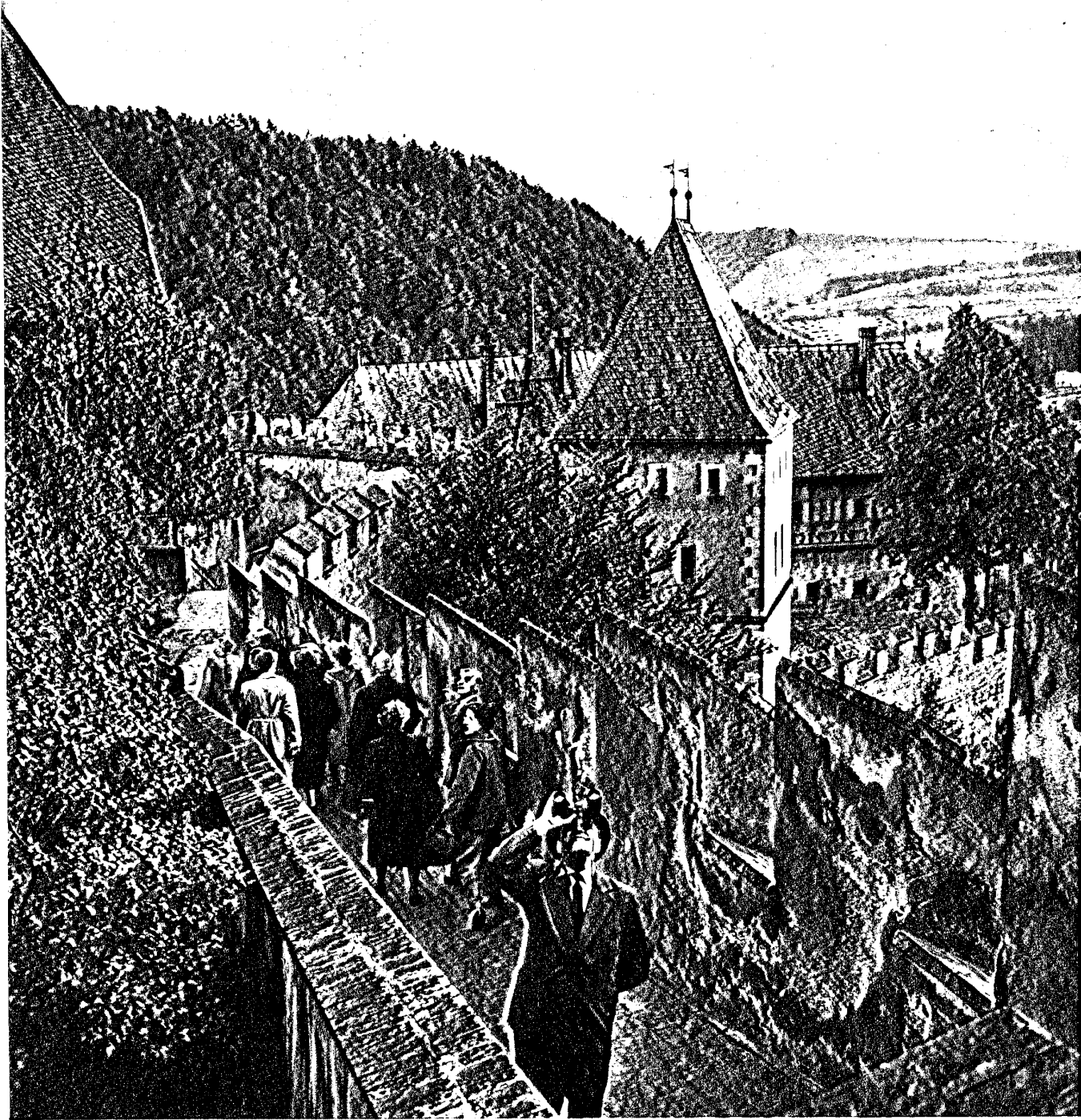
A hero of our days



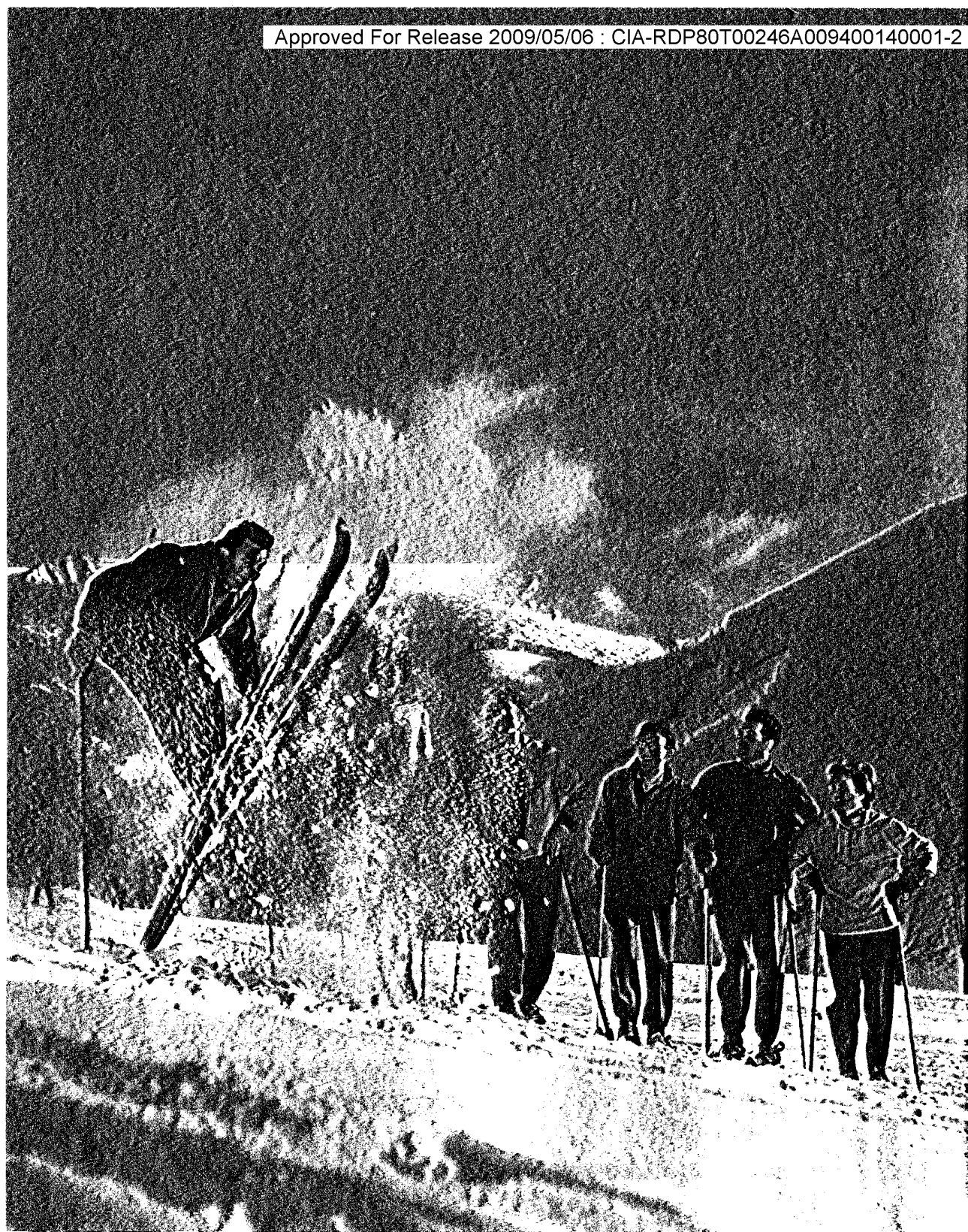


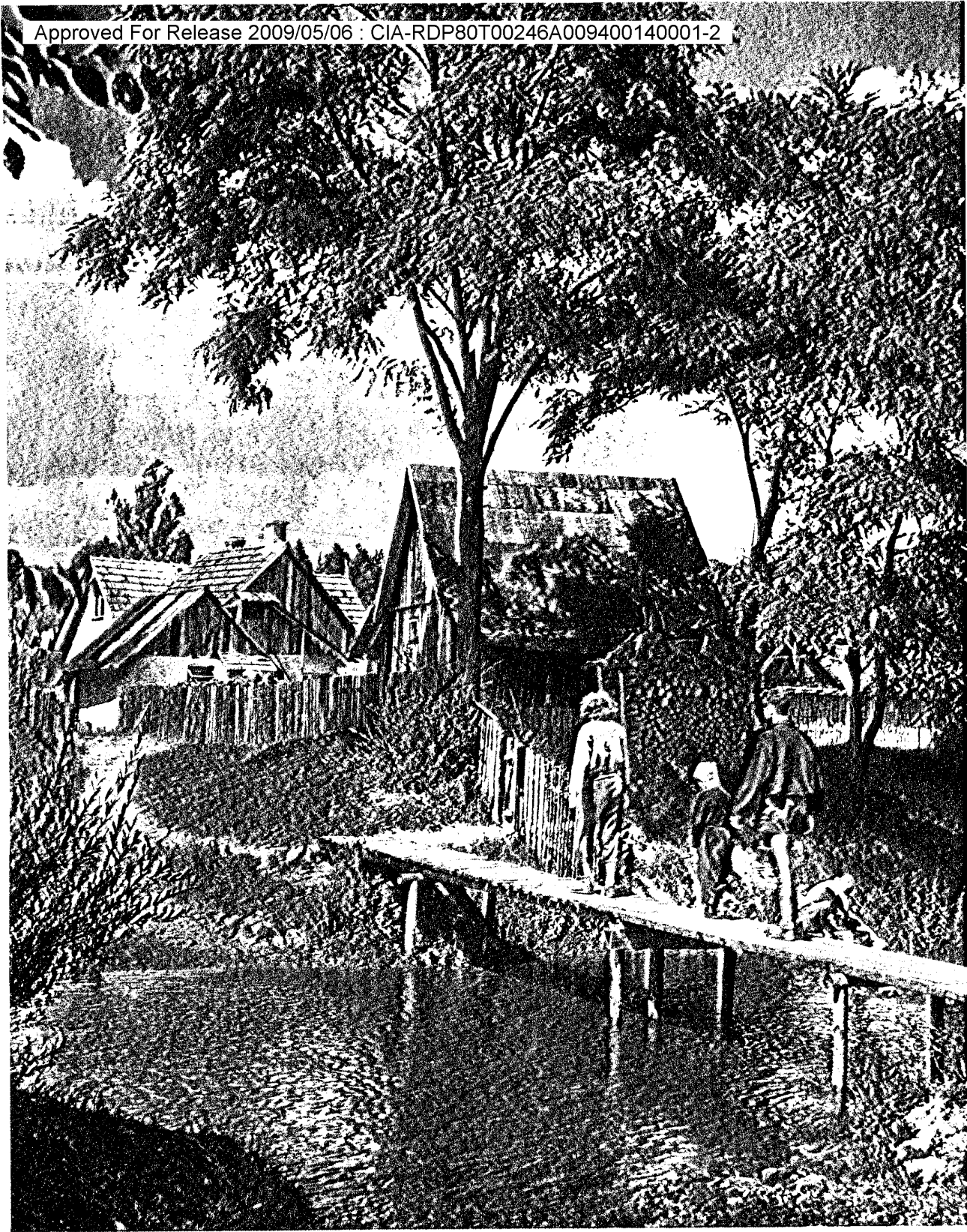
Theme from a spa



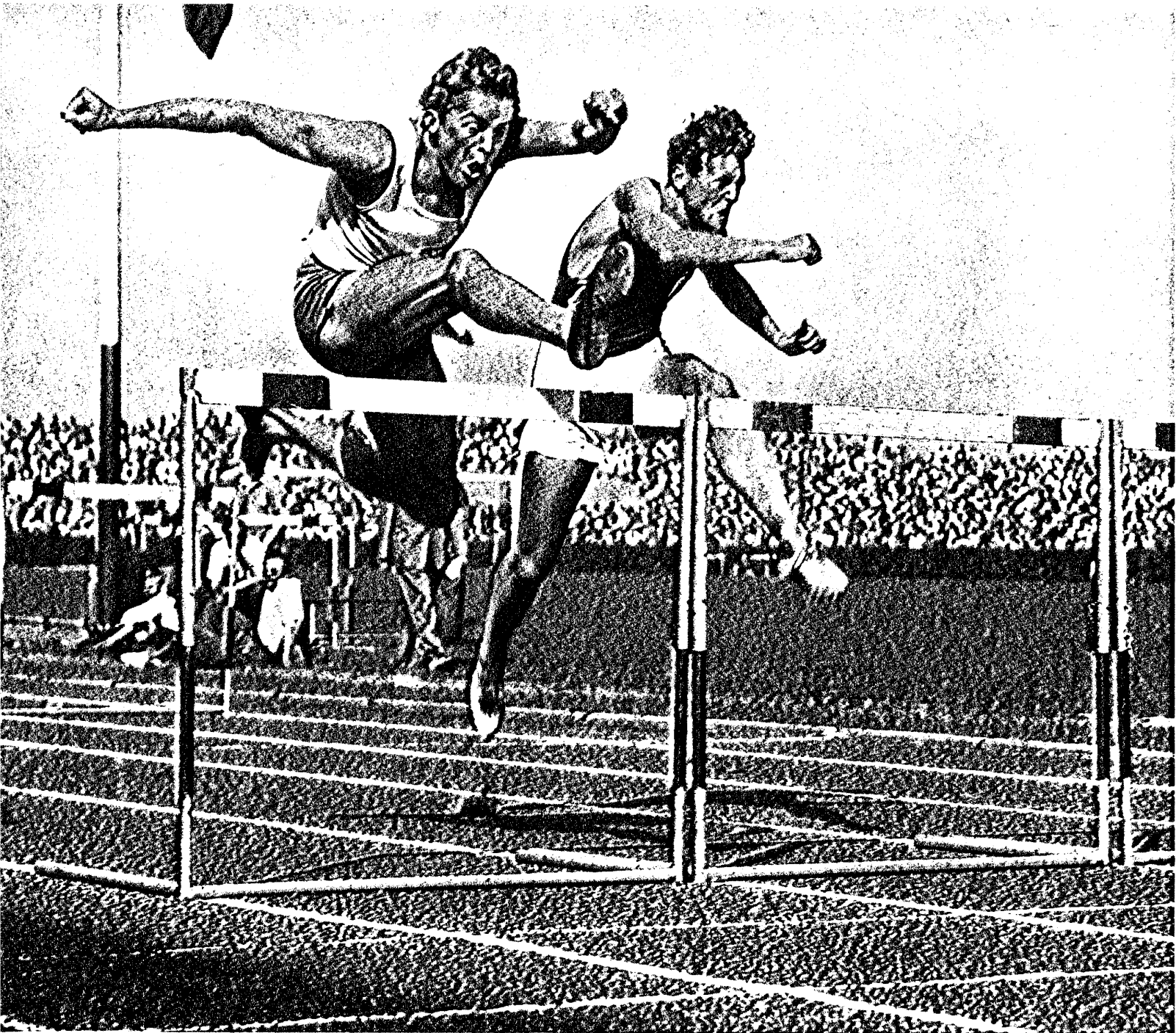


The enchanted wanderer underneath the Castle

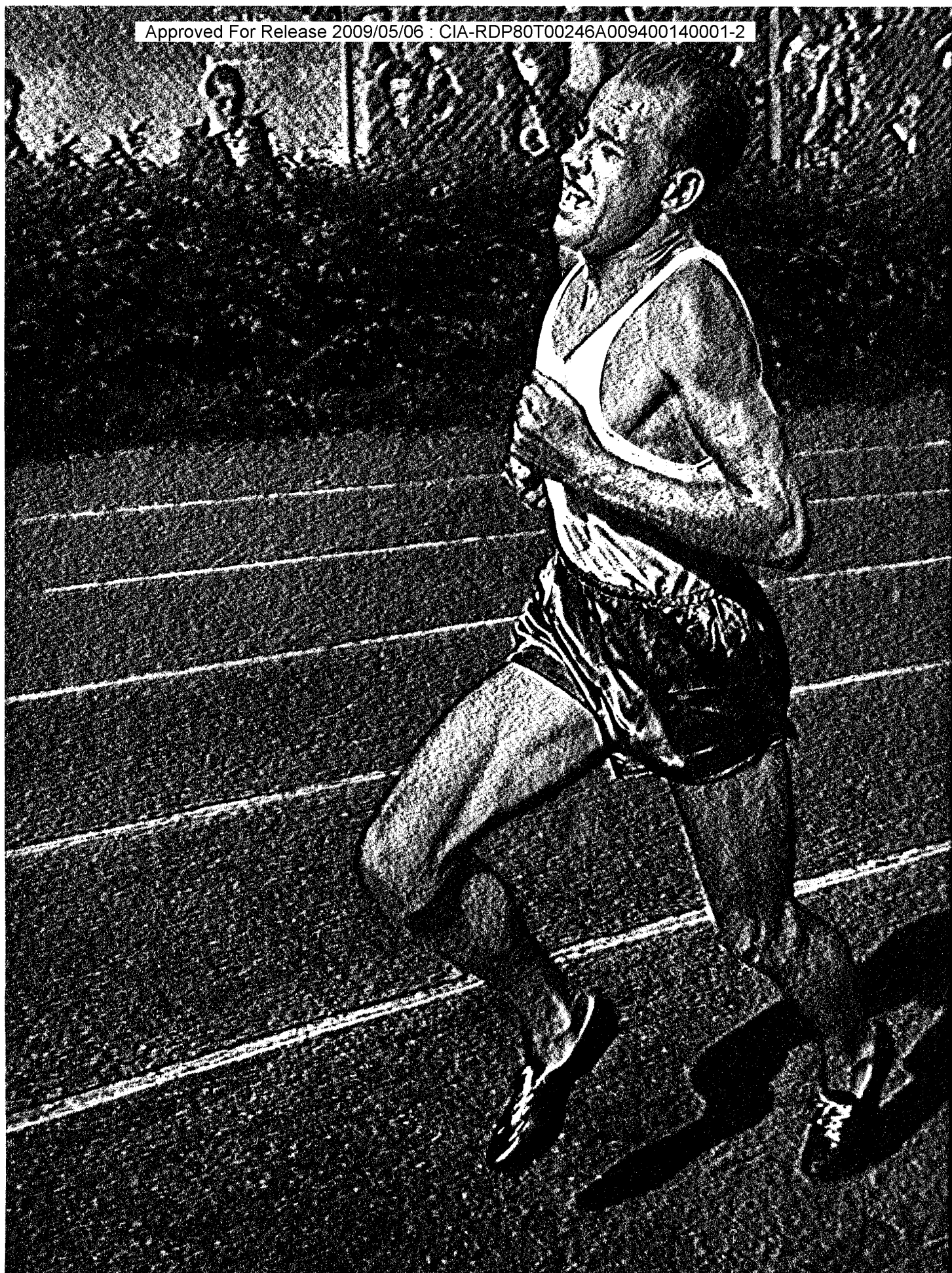




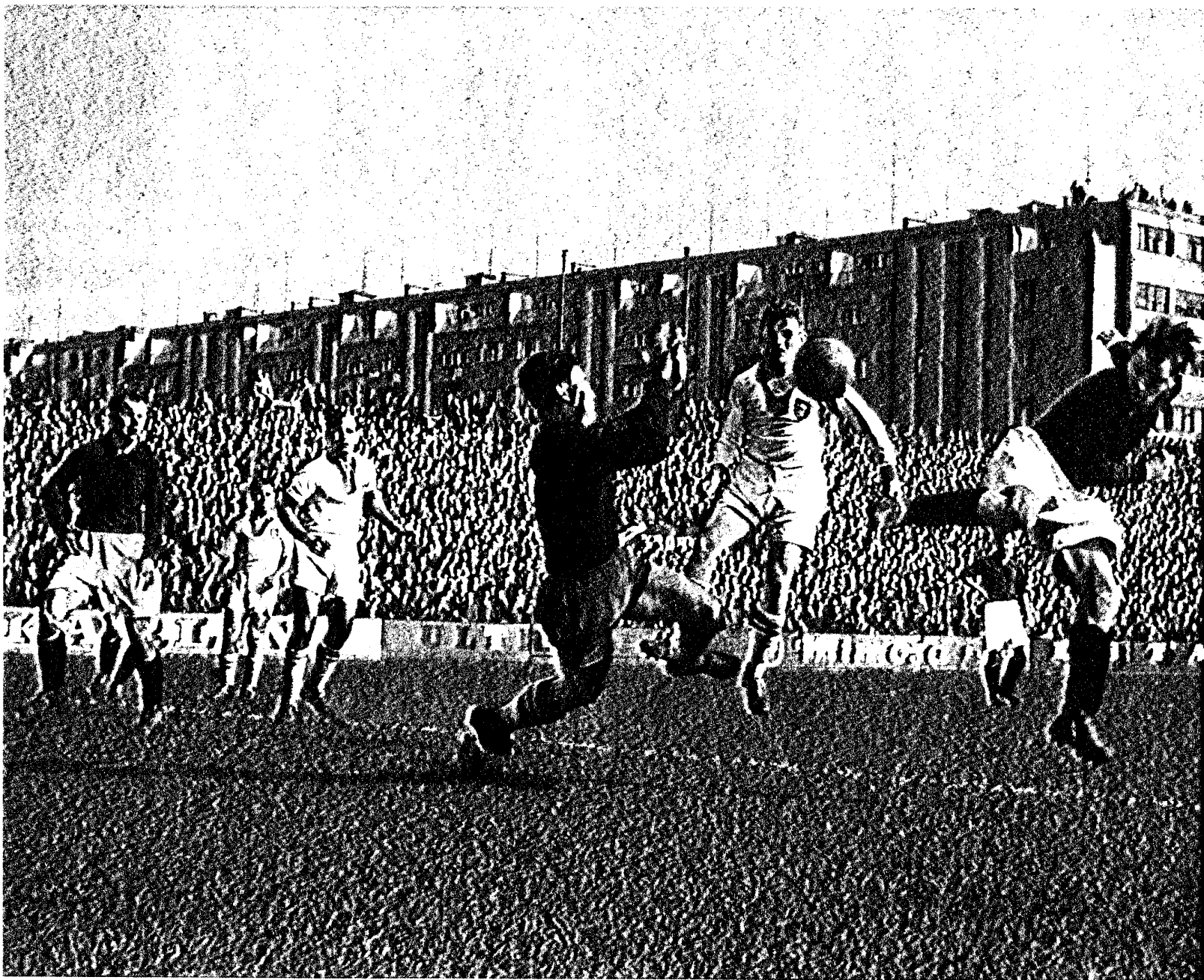
Summer holidays

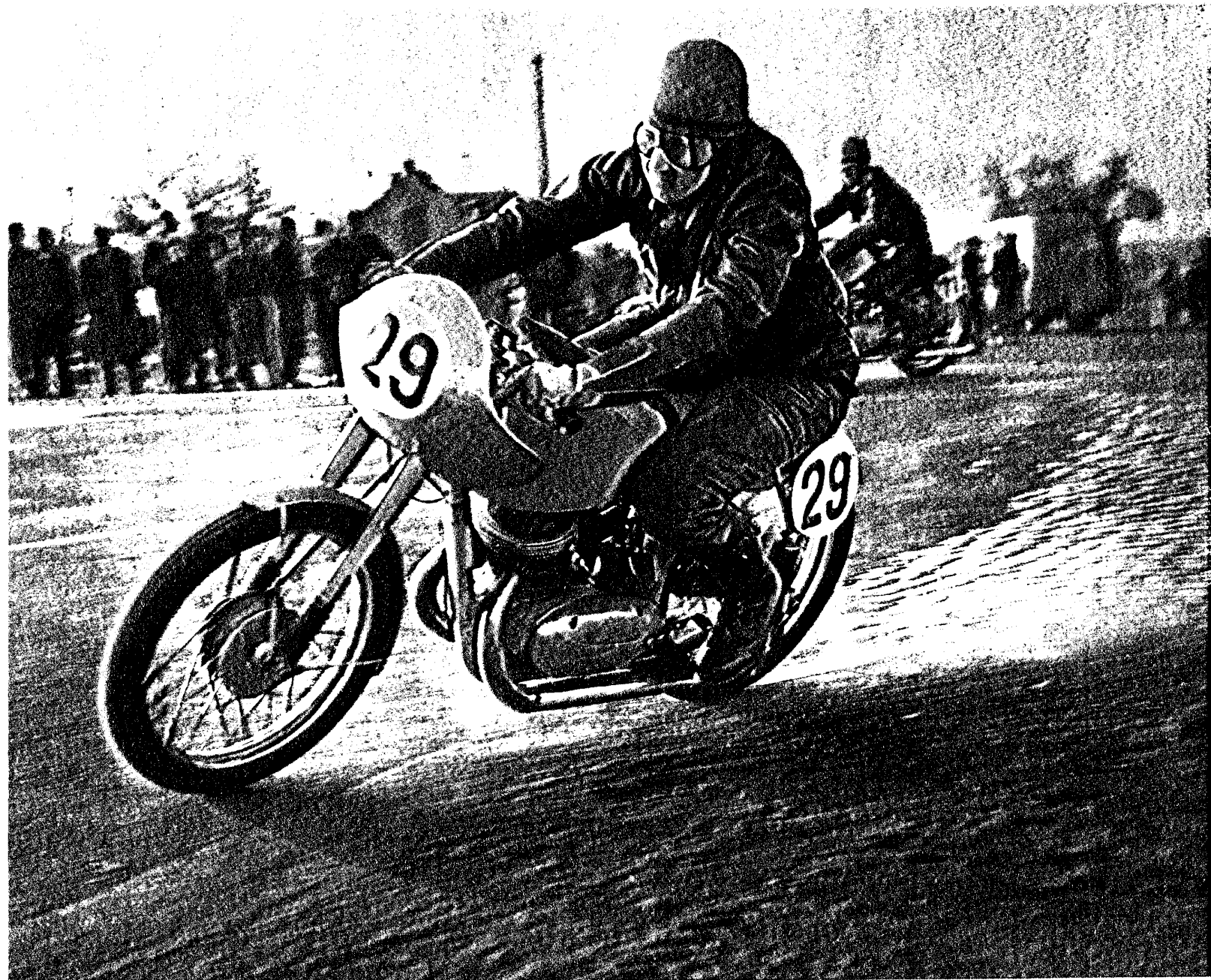


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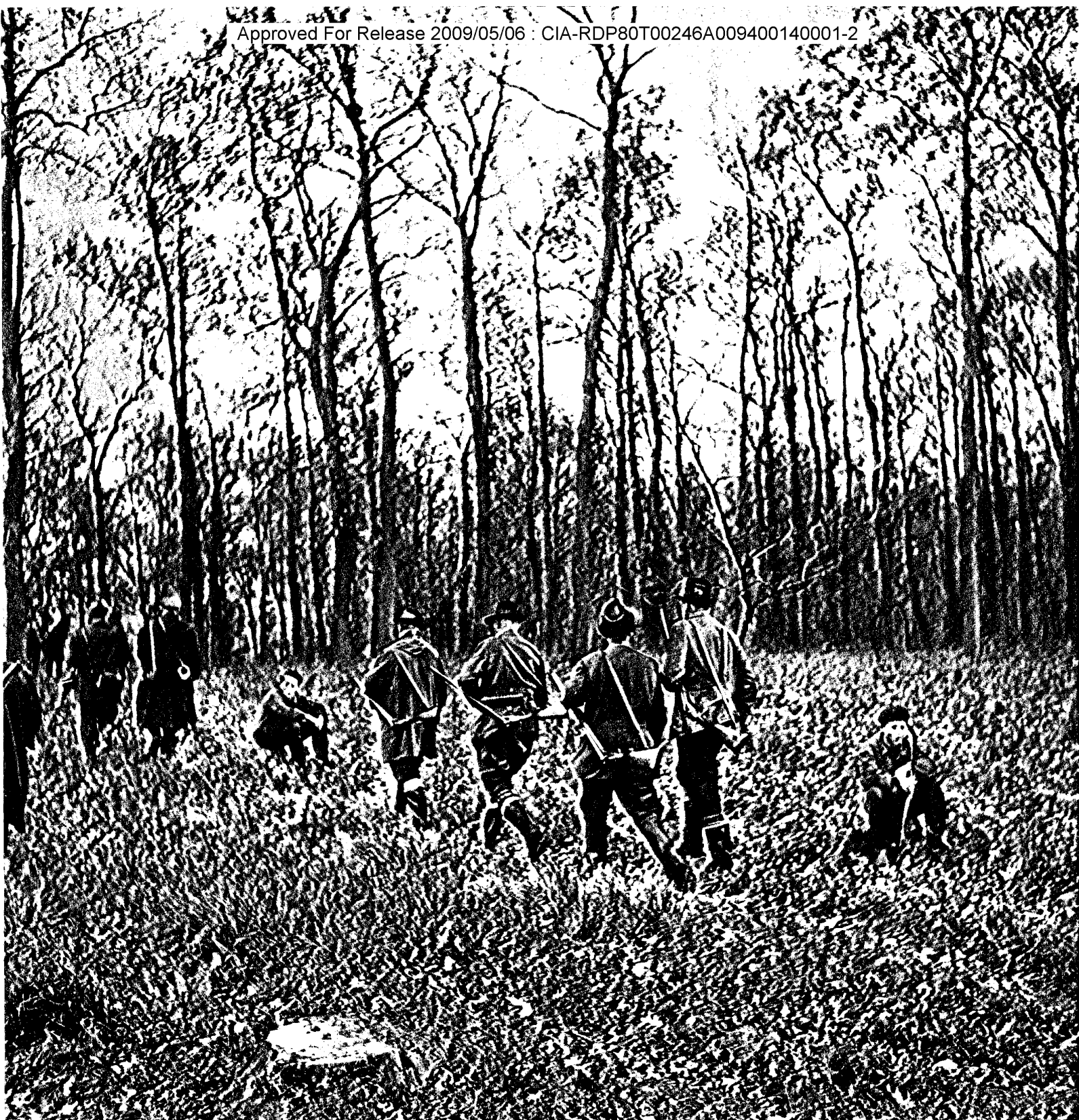




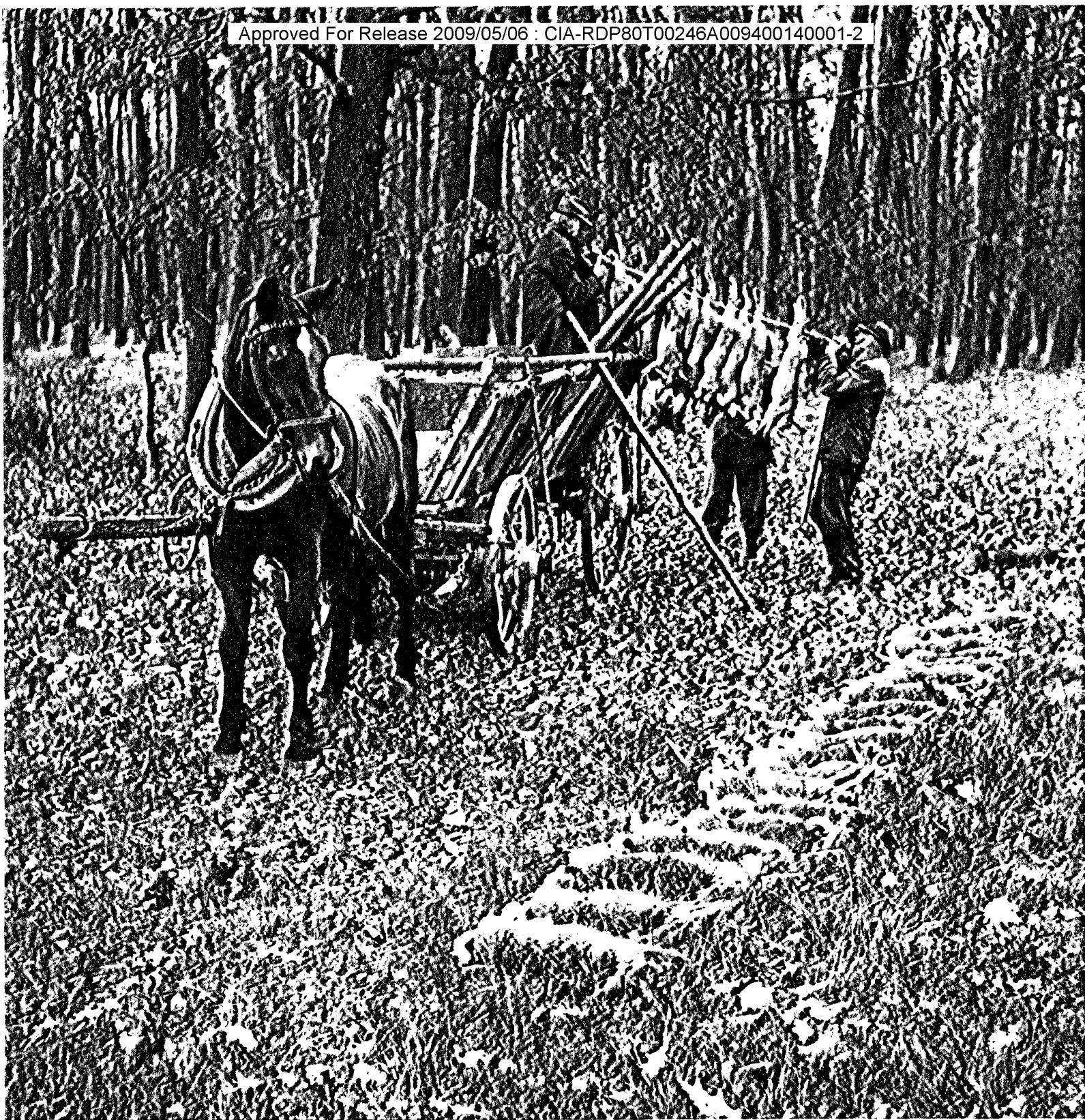
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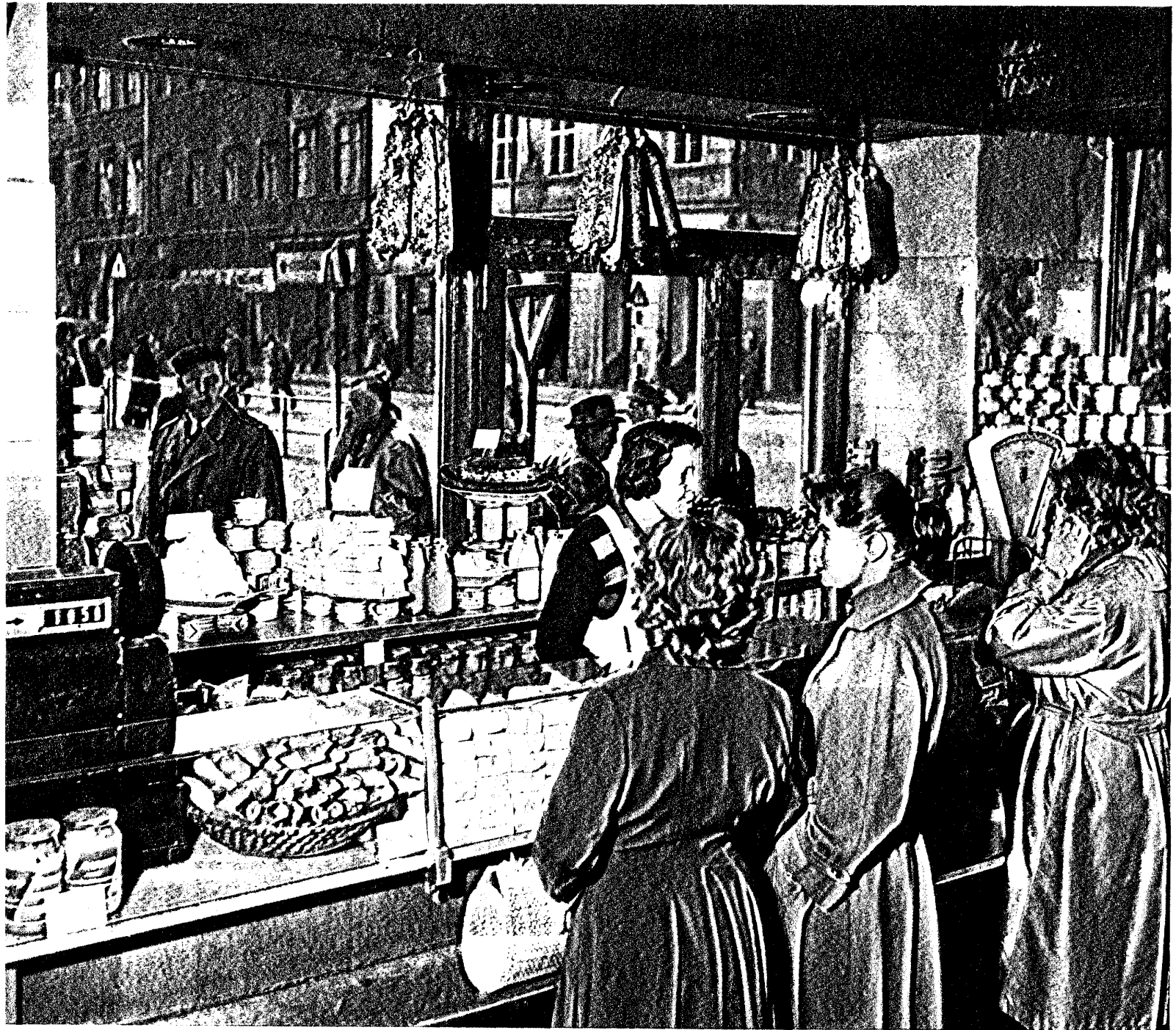


The carefree hunter





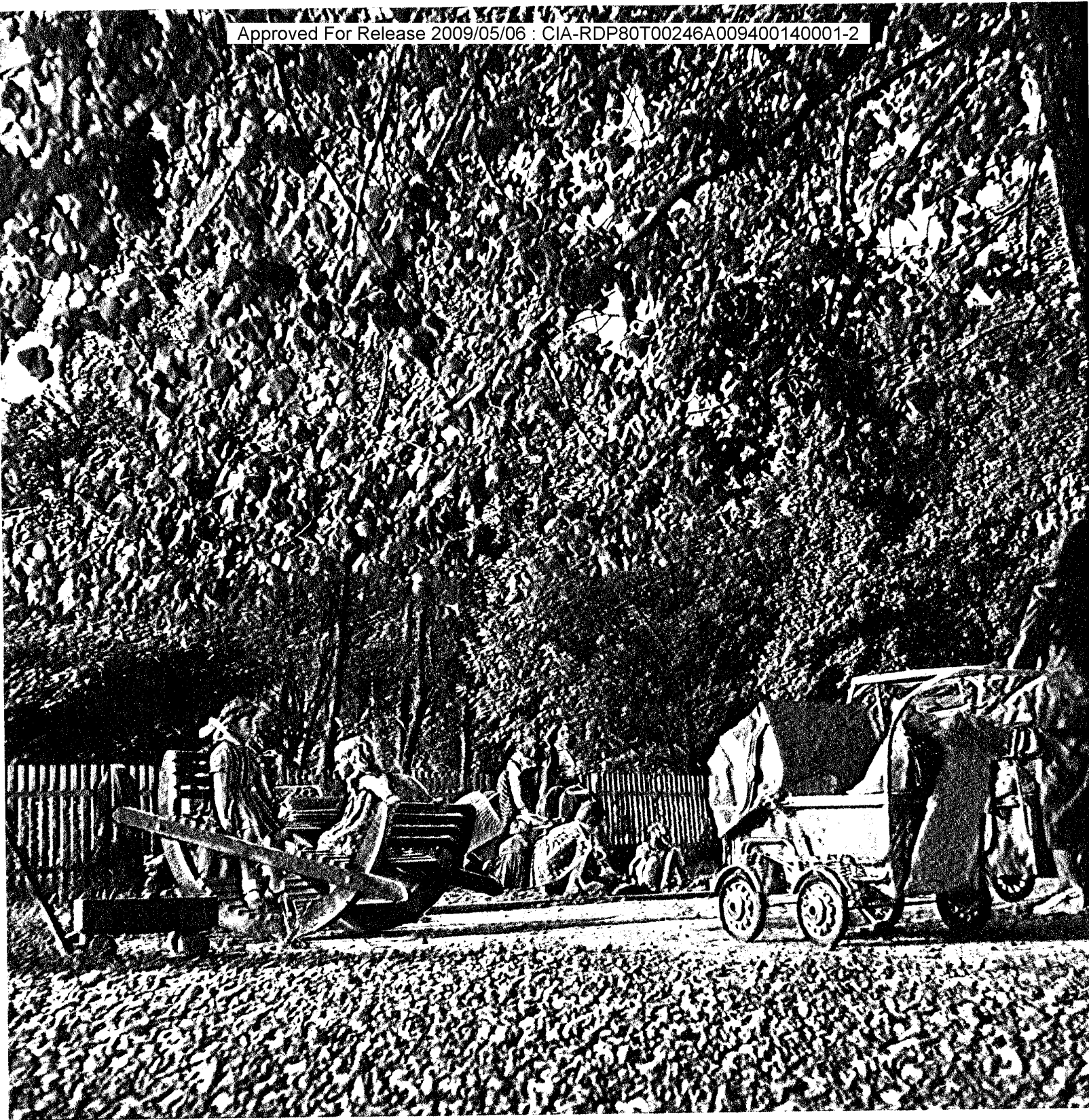
Victims whom no one pities



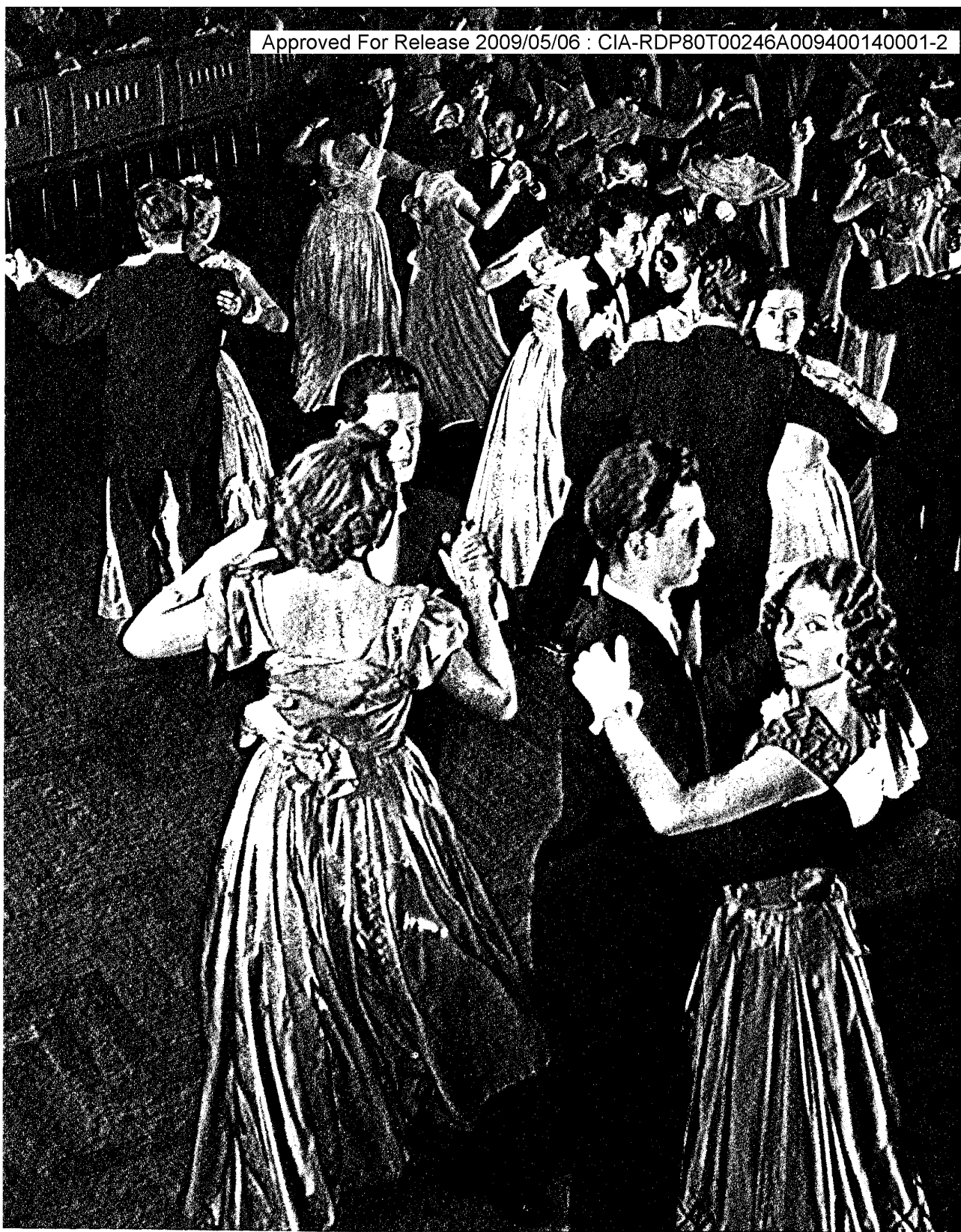


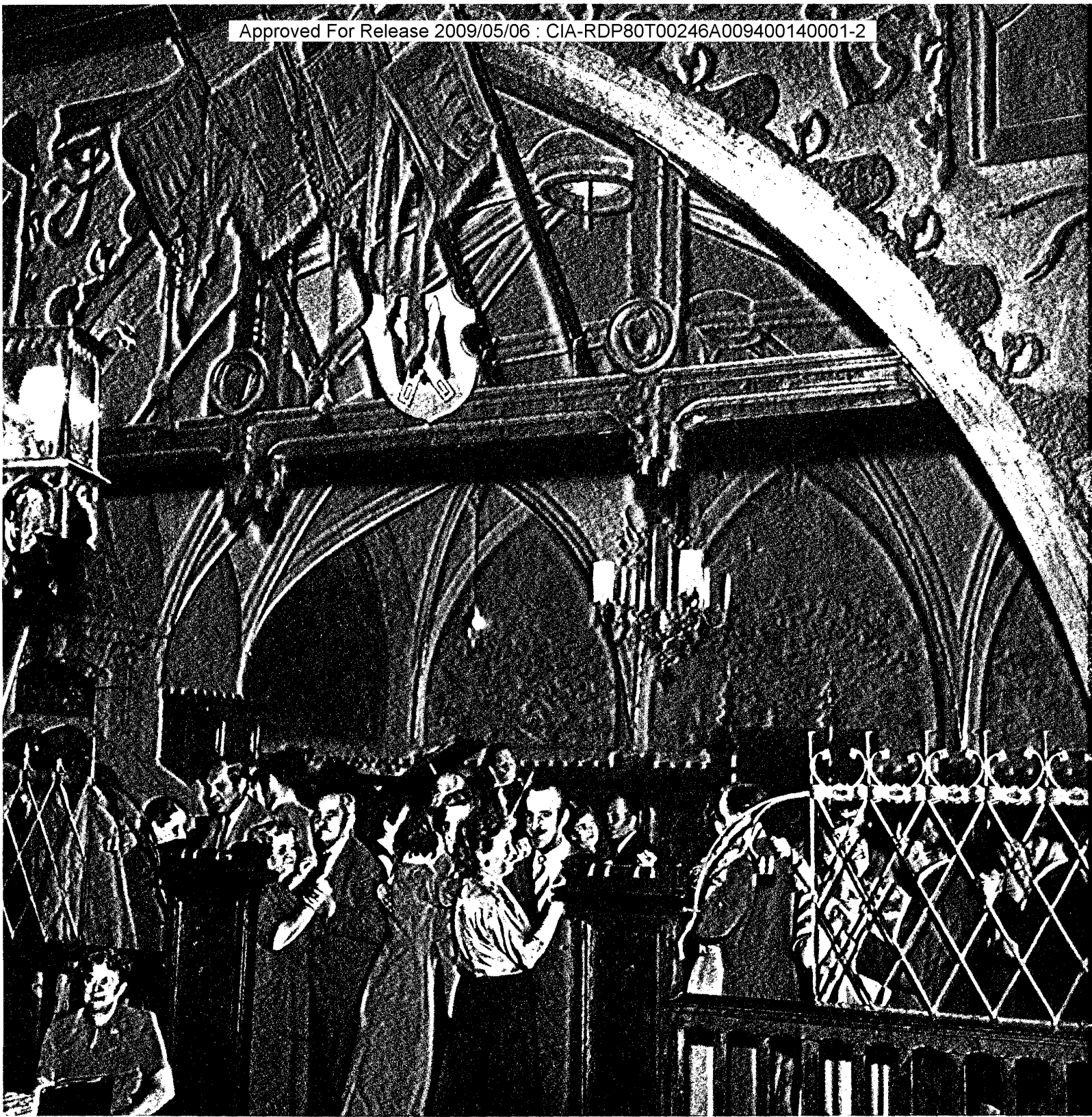
Where there's a child, there are smiles



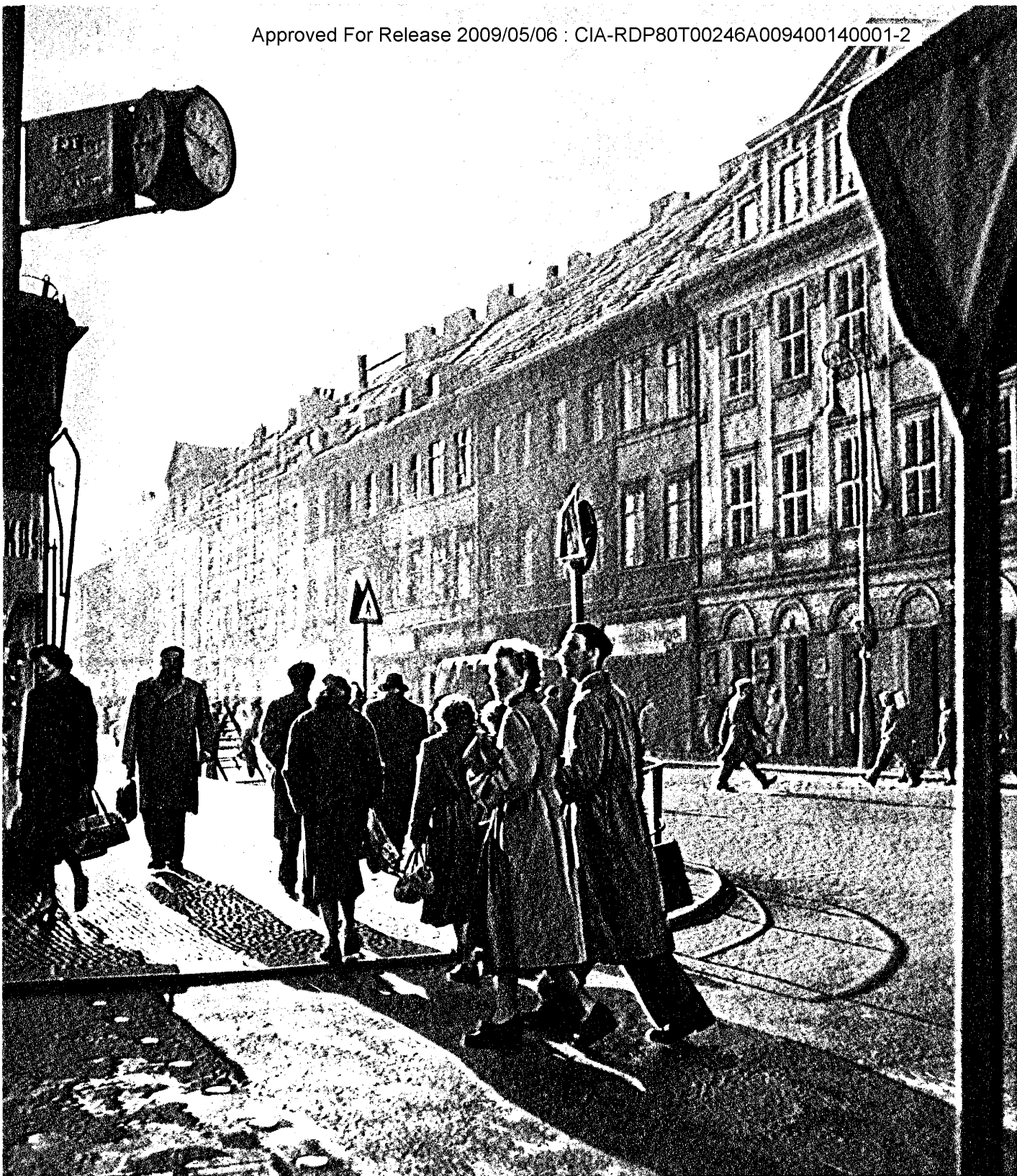


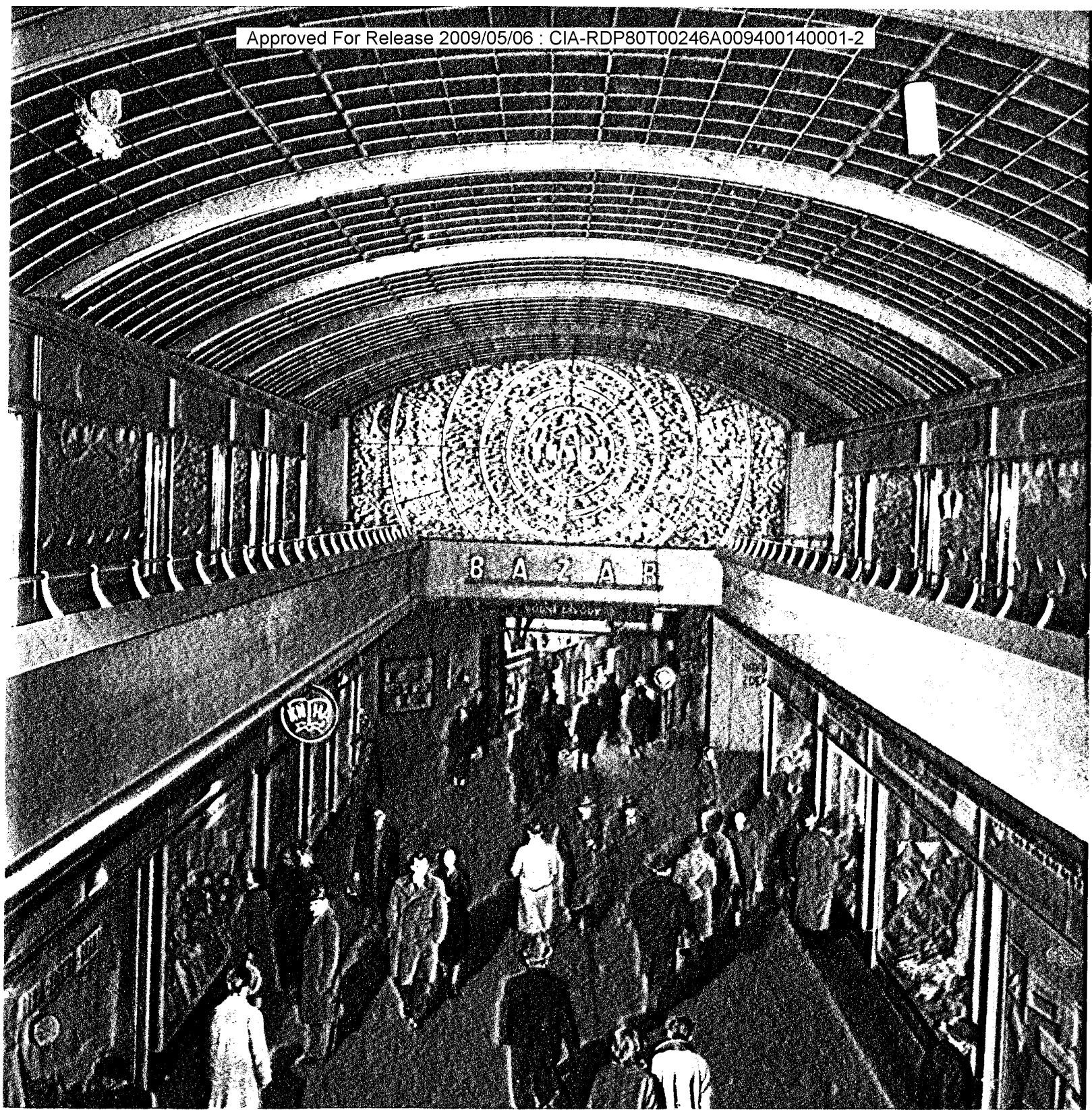
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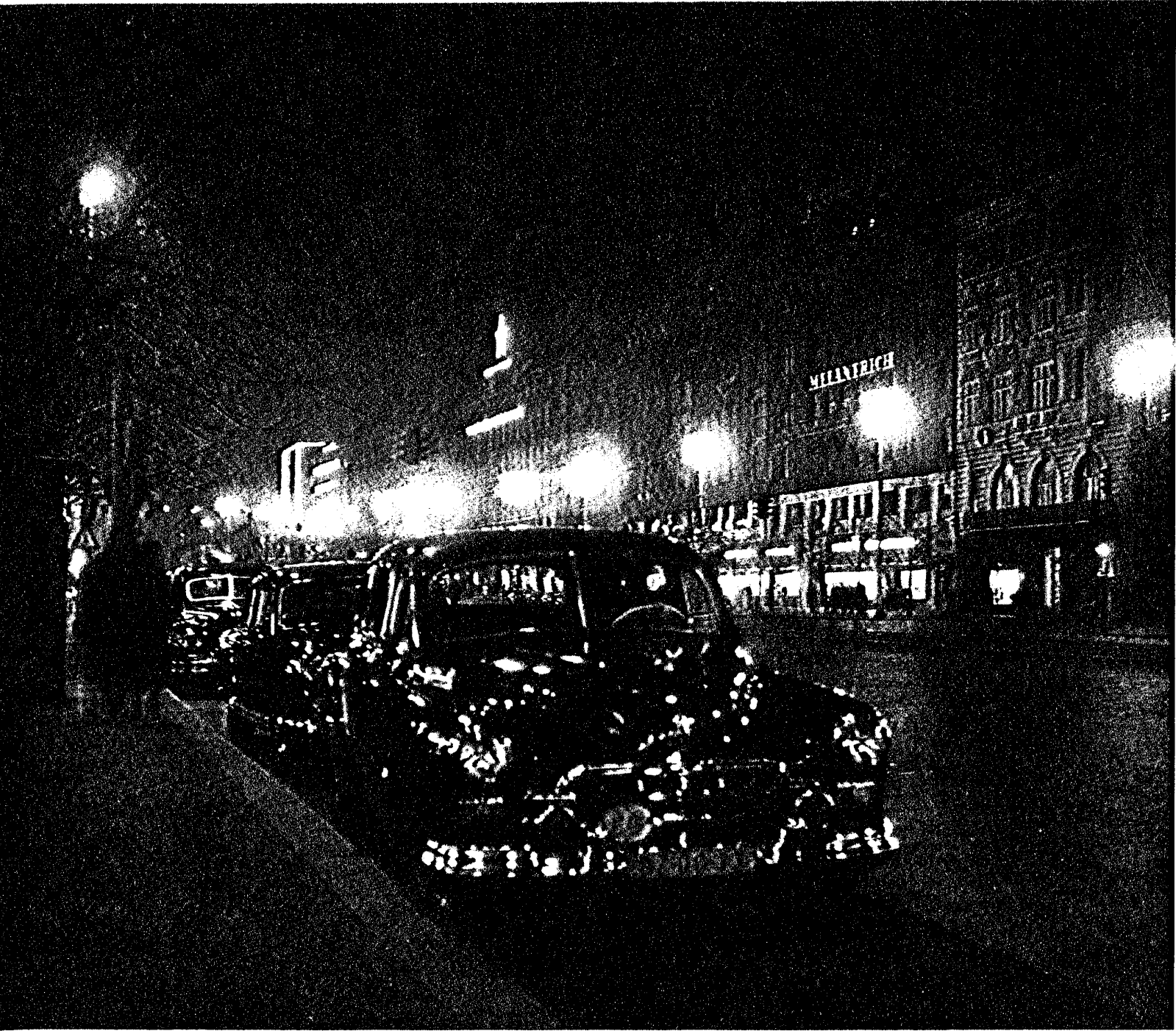
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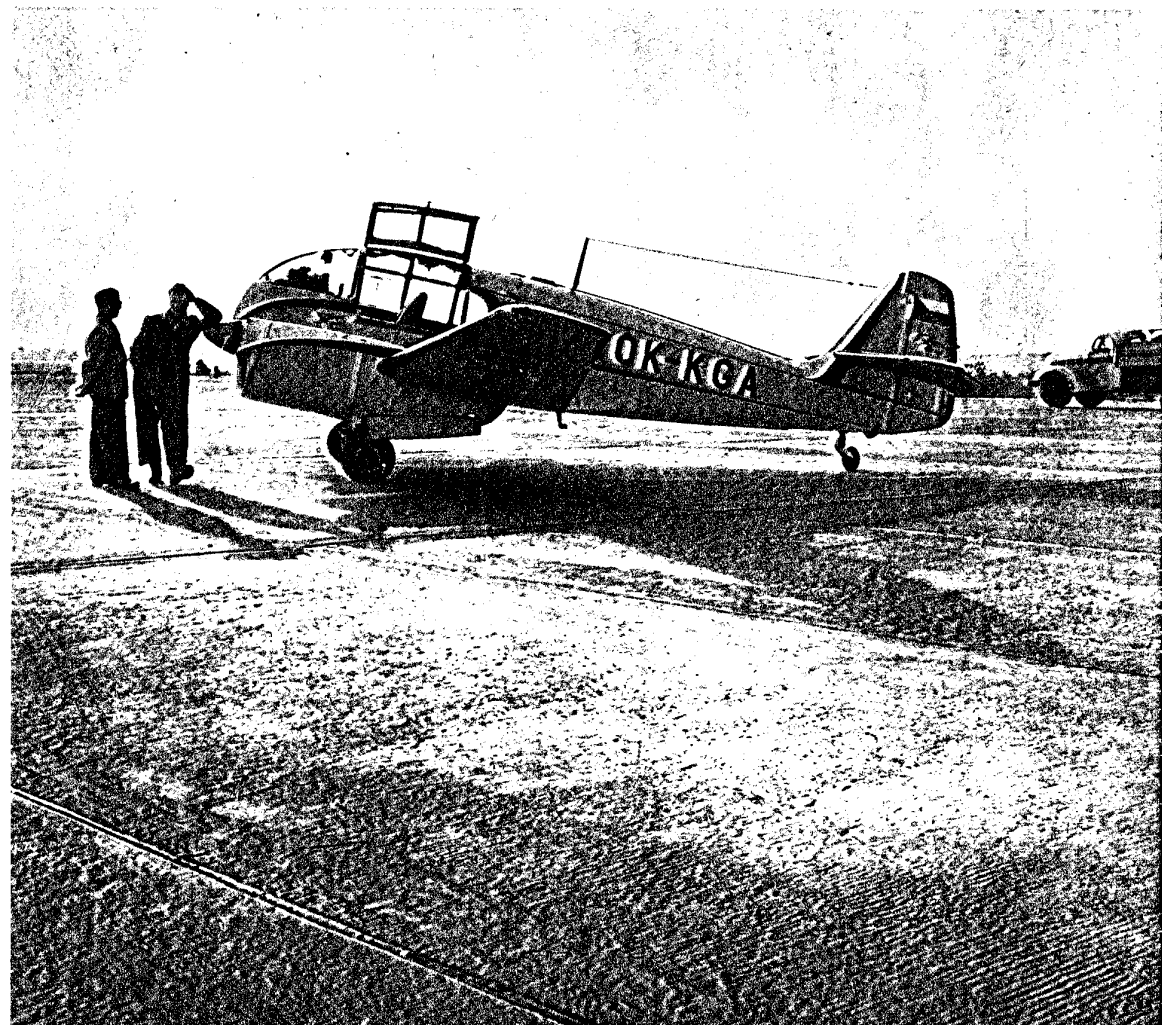


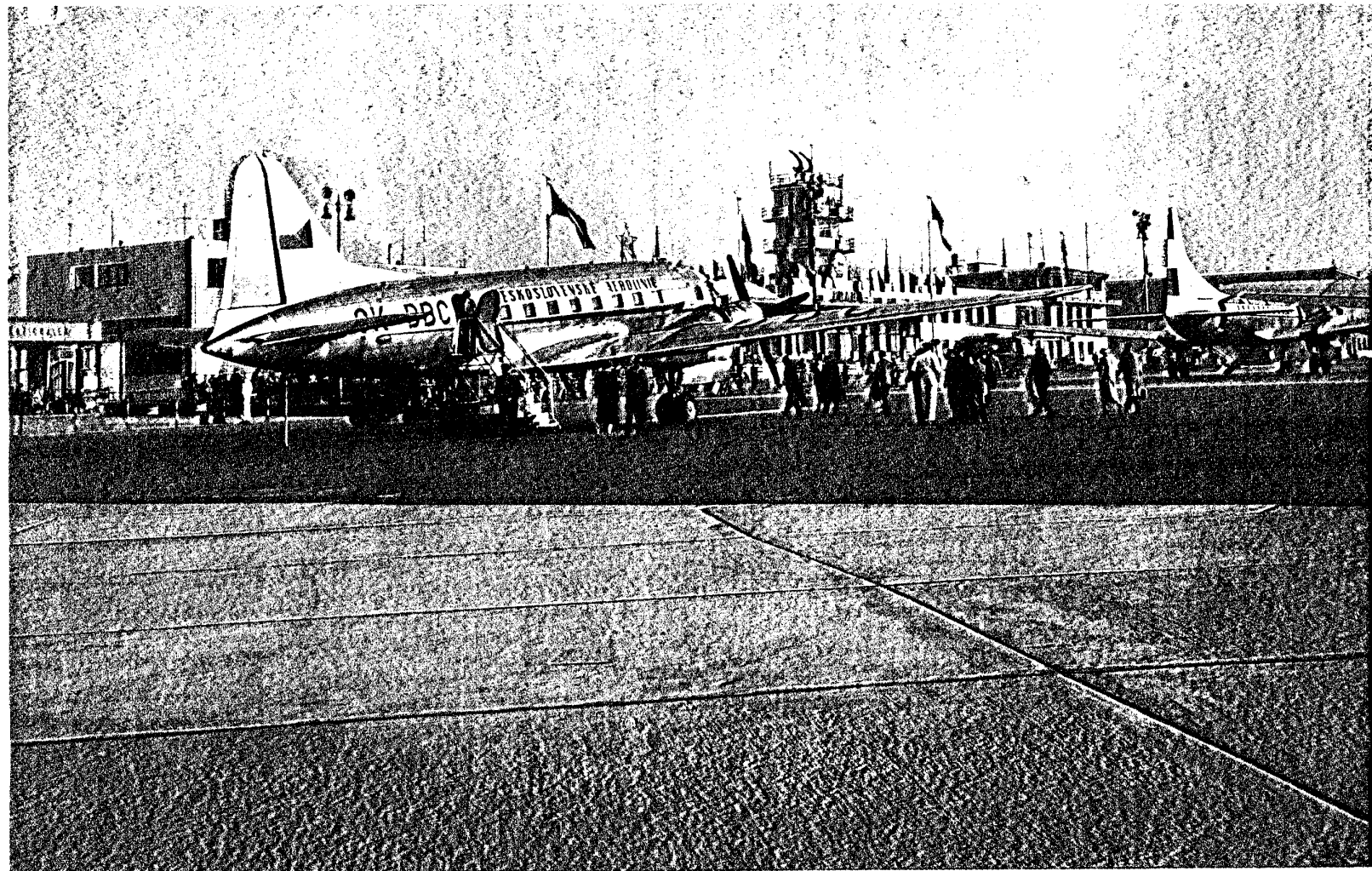
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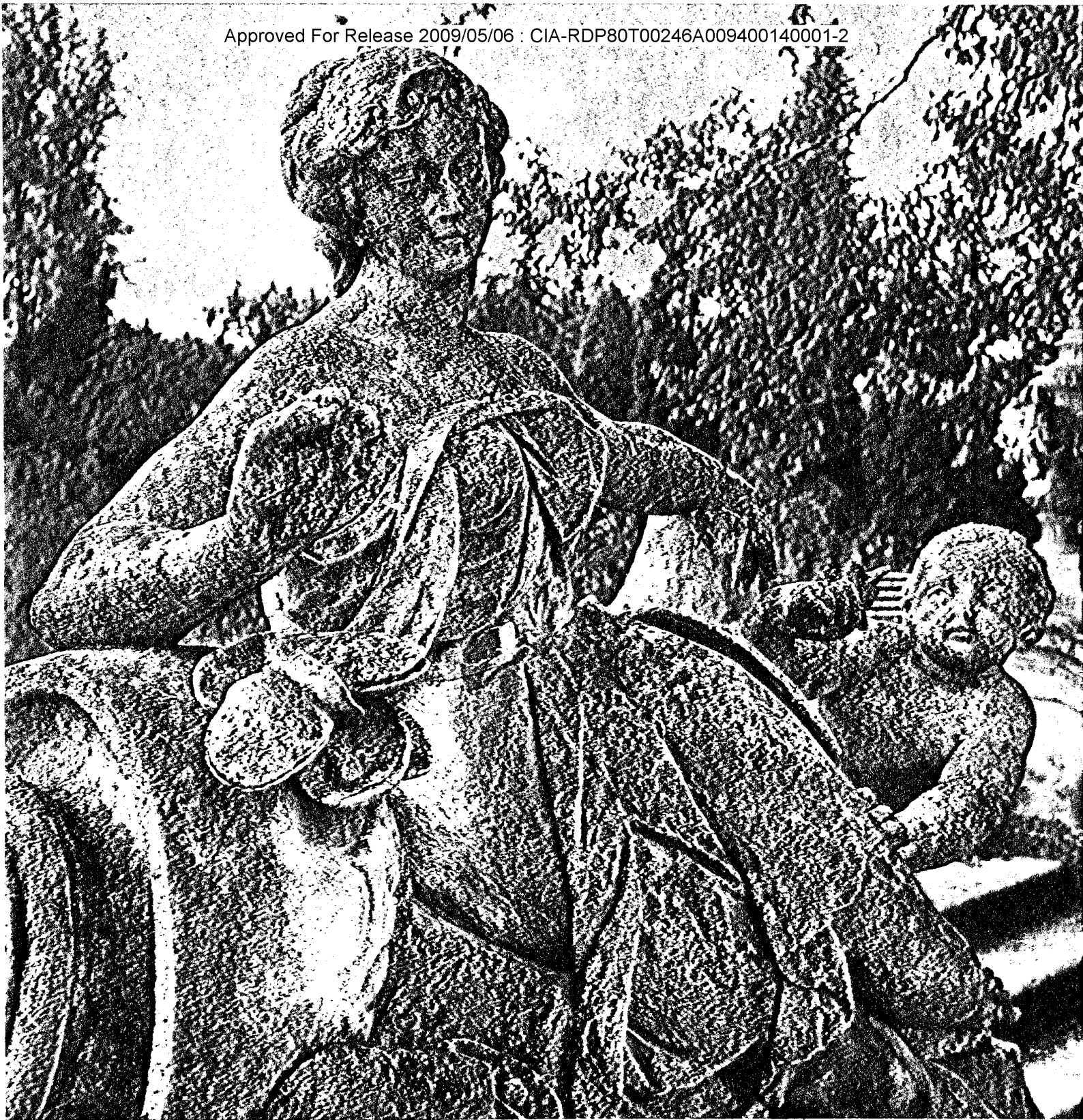
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...than this flying giant





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◀ Autumn, the producer, seeks his Romeo and Juliet



The humility of the Gothic

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The excitement
of the baroque ►

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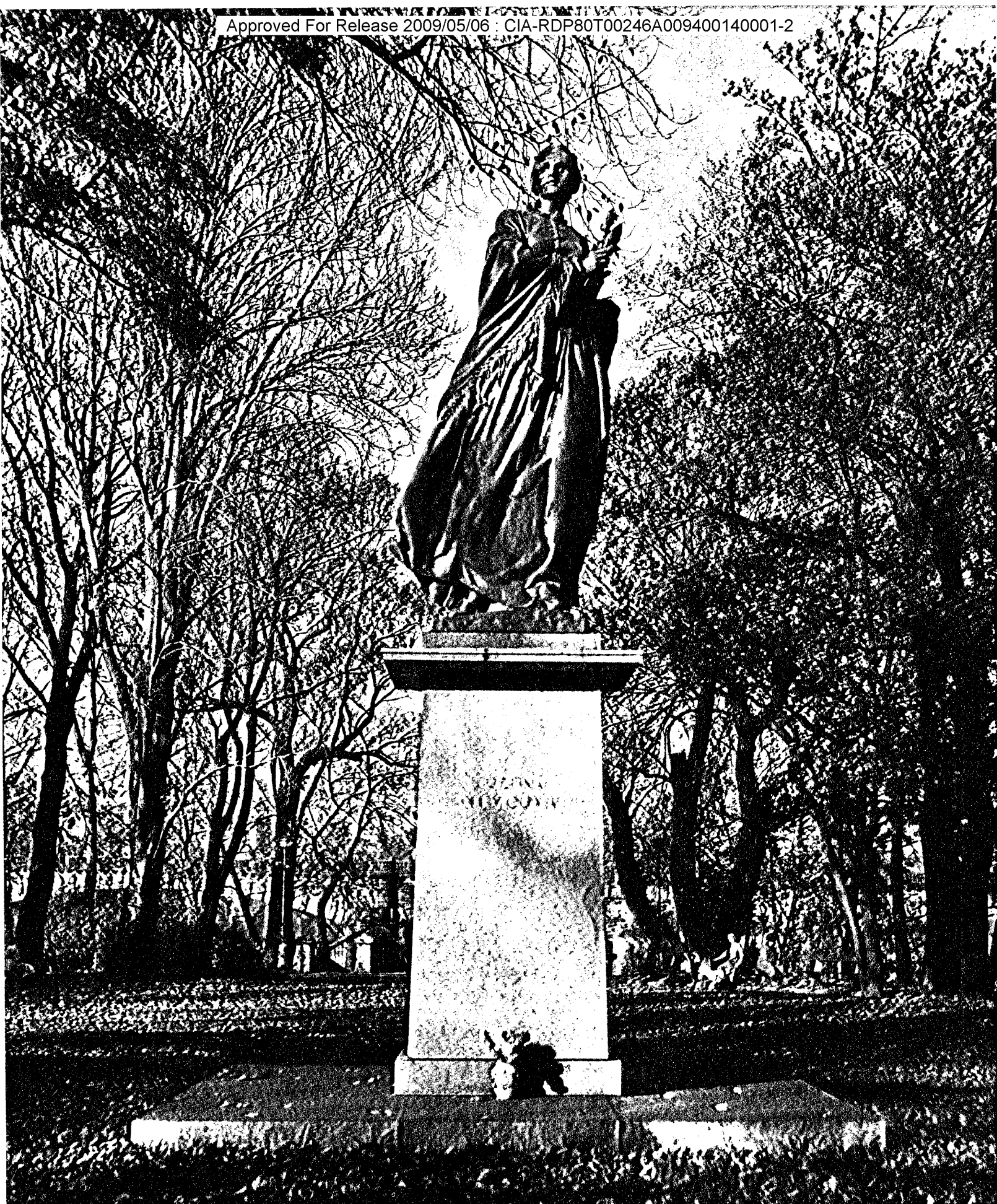




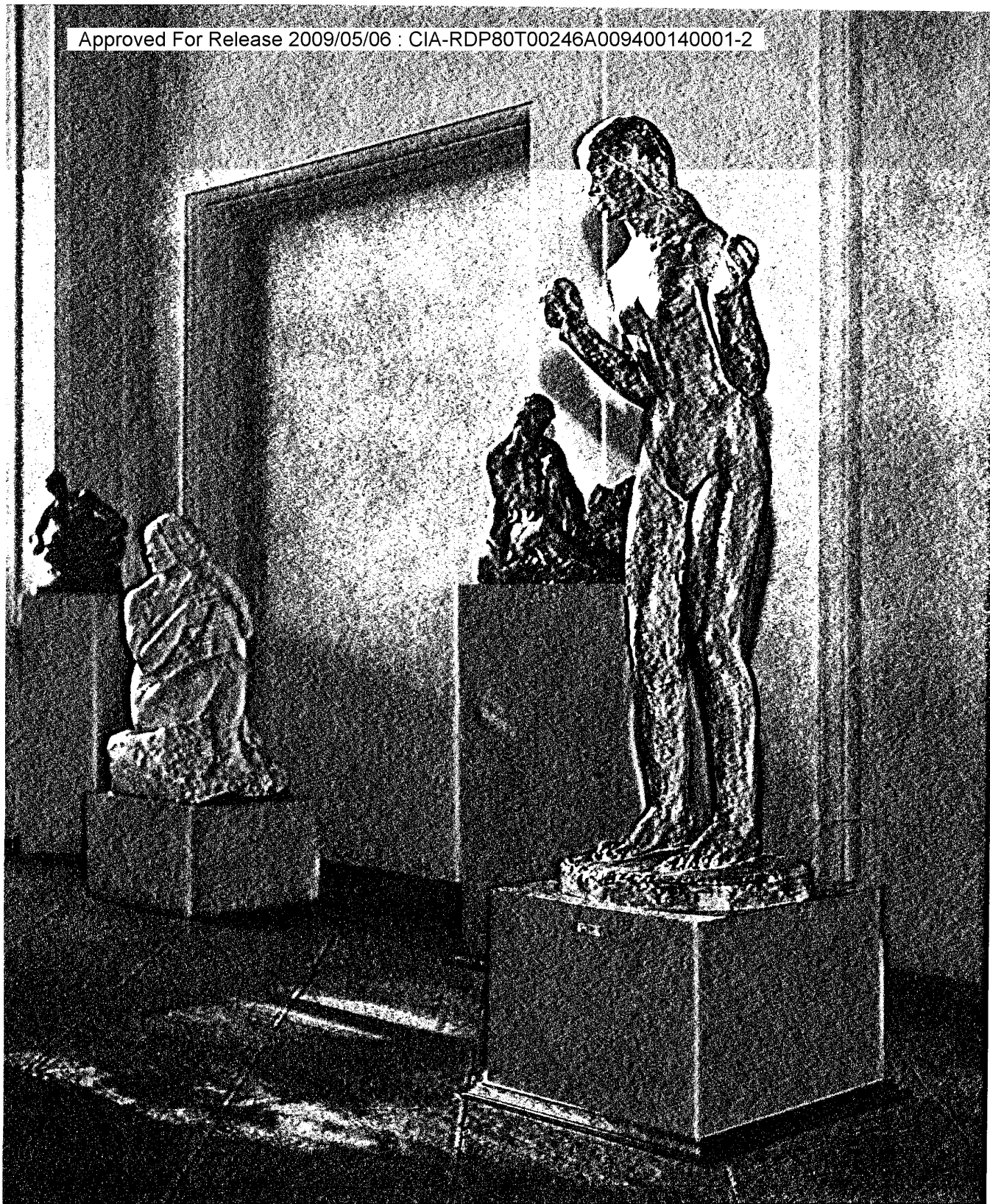


The pathos of stone

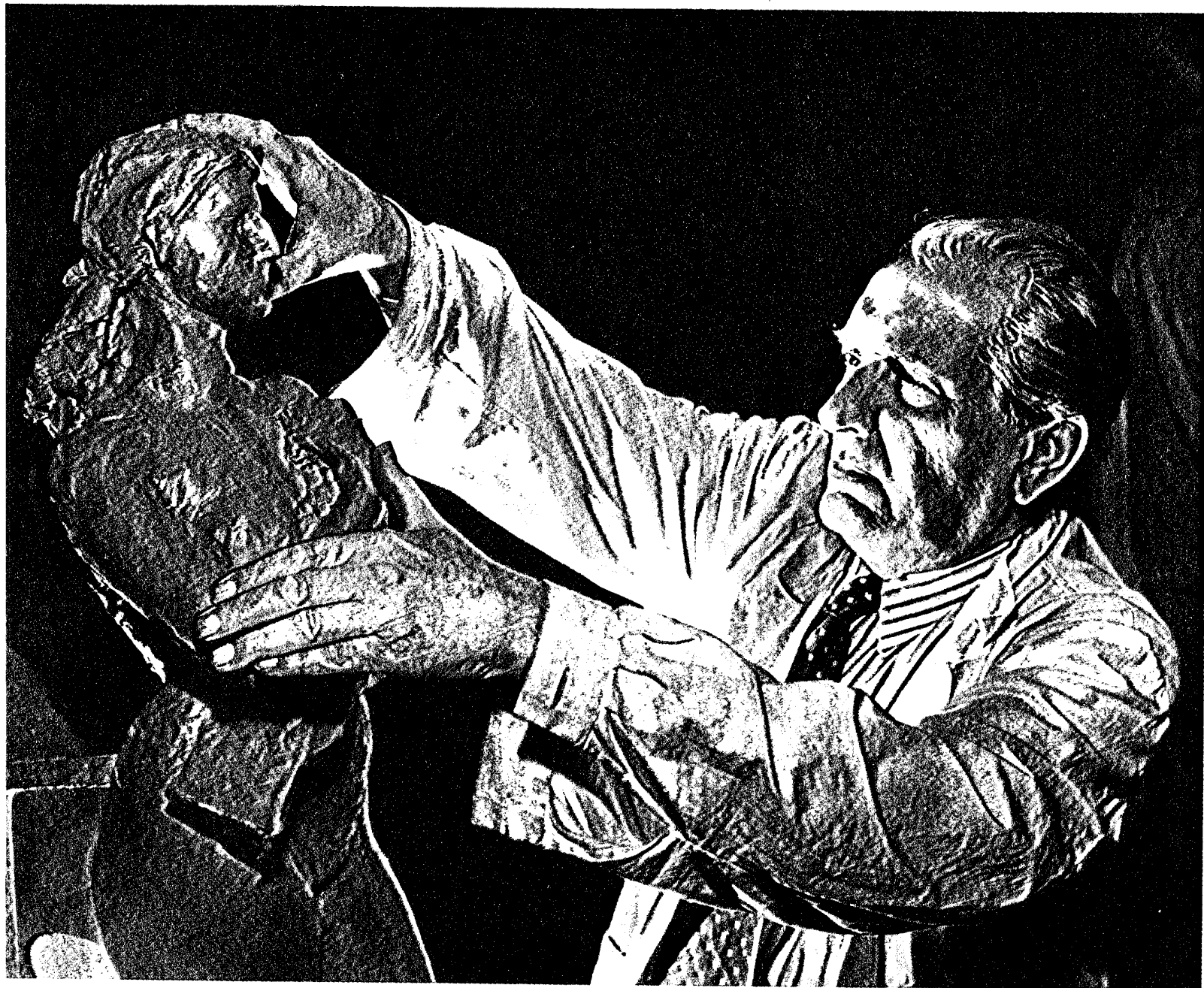


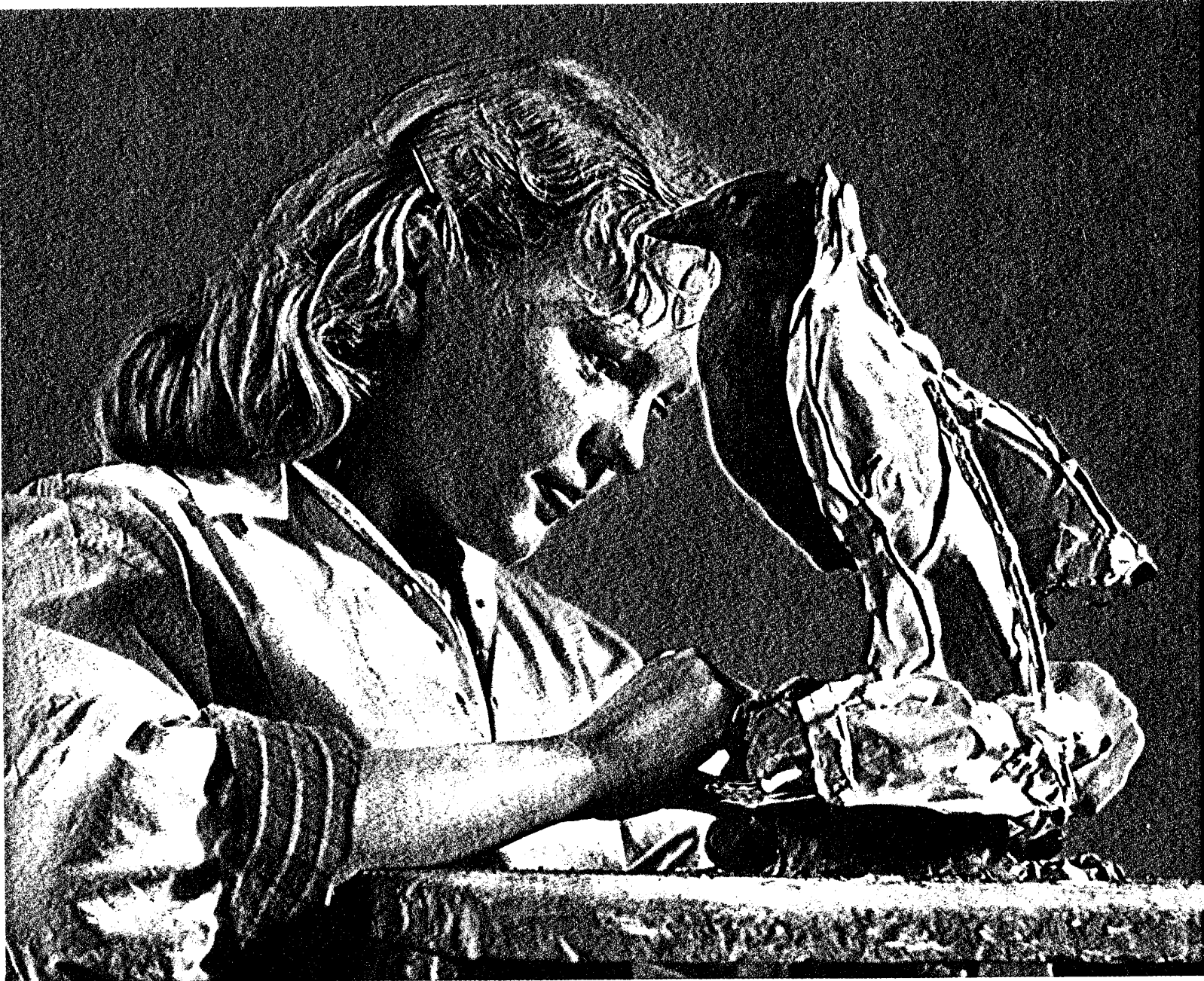






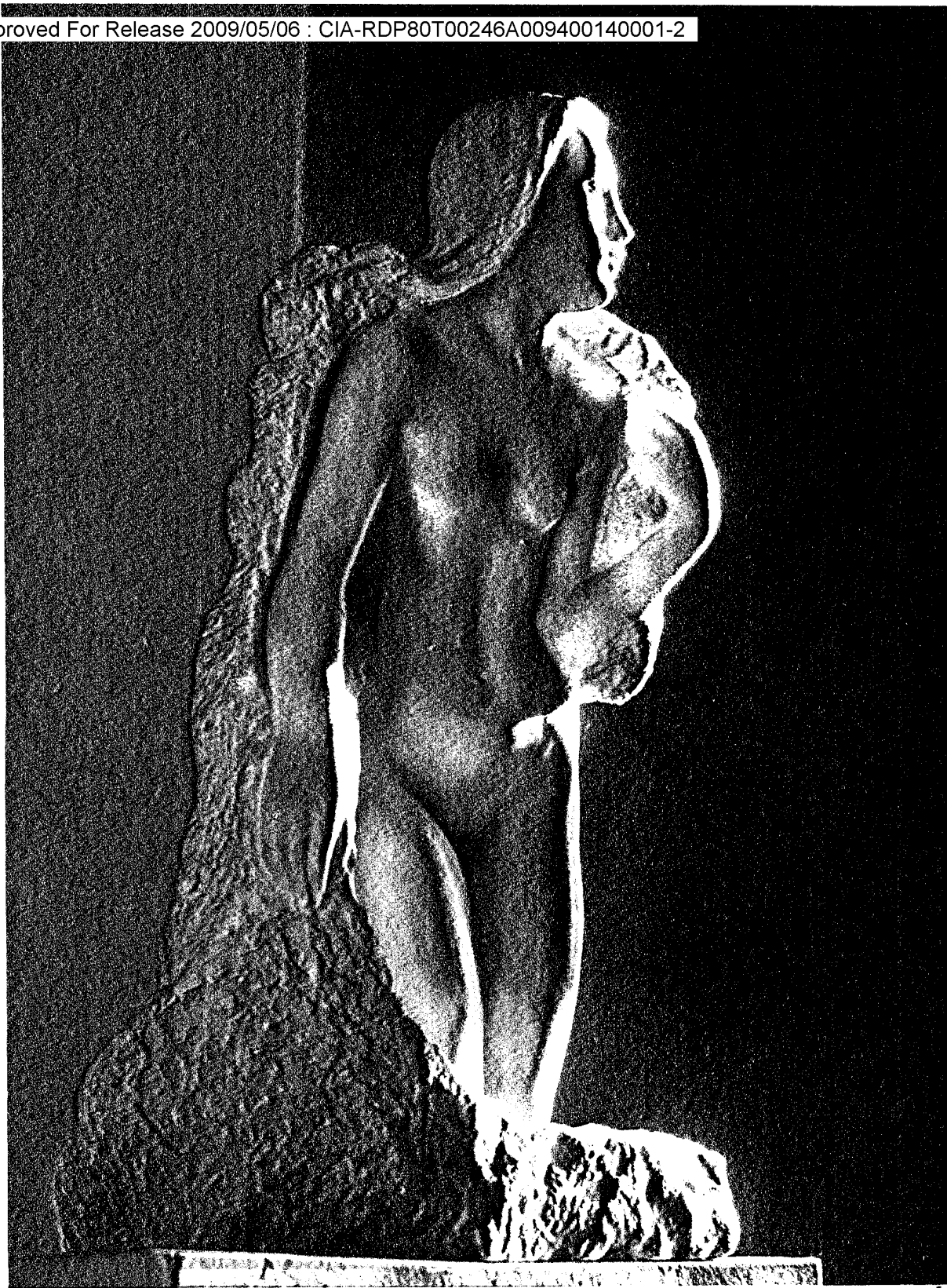
Tread softly as you pass



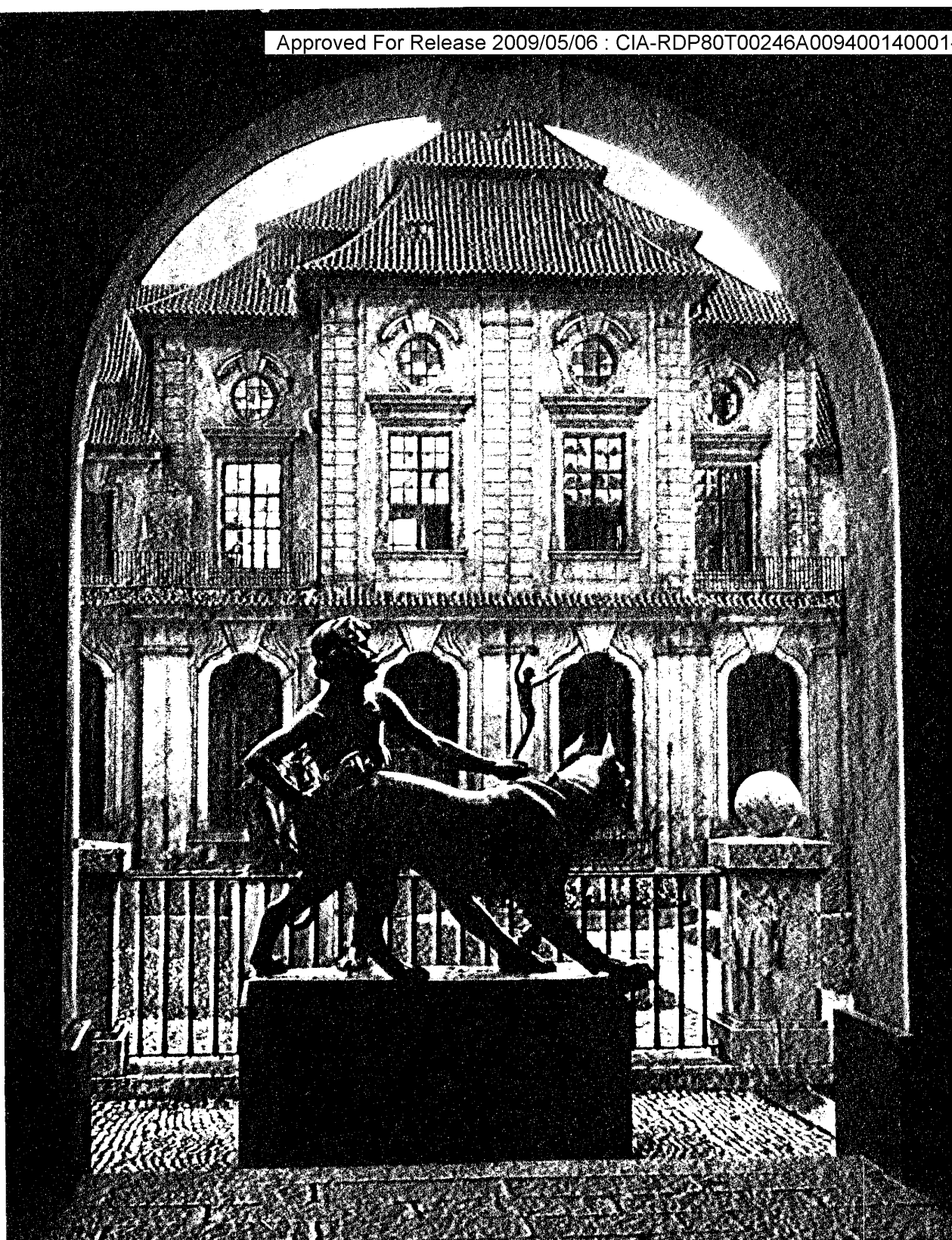


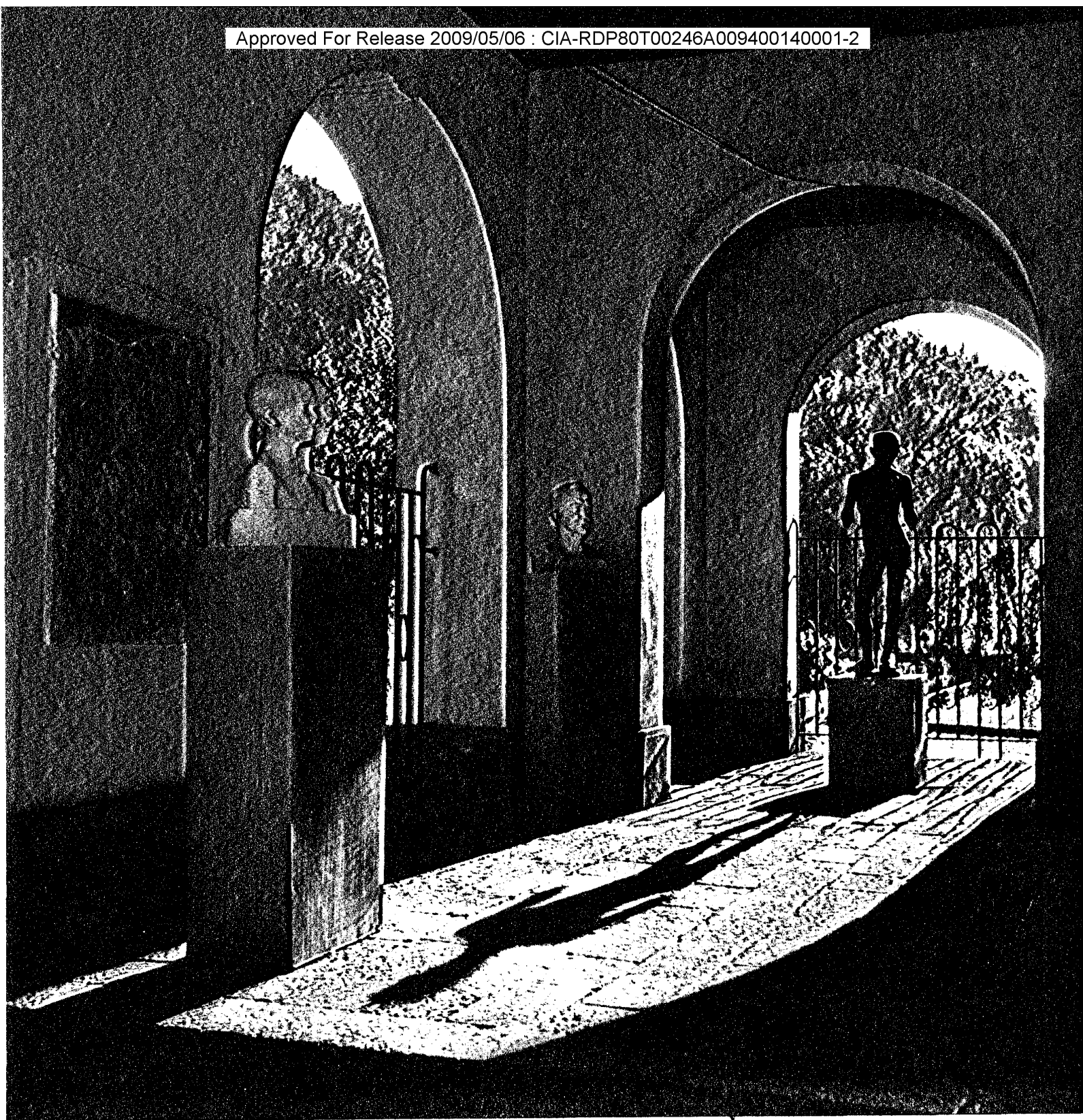
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Risen from the foam?



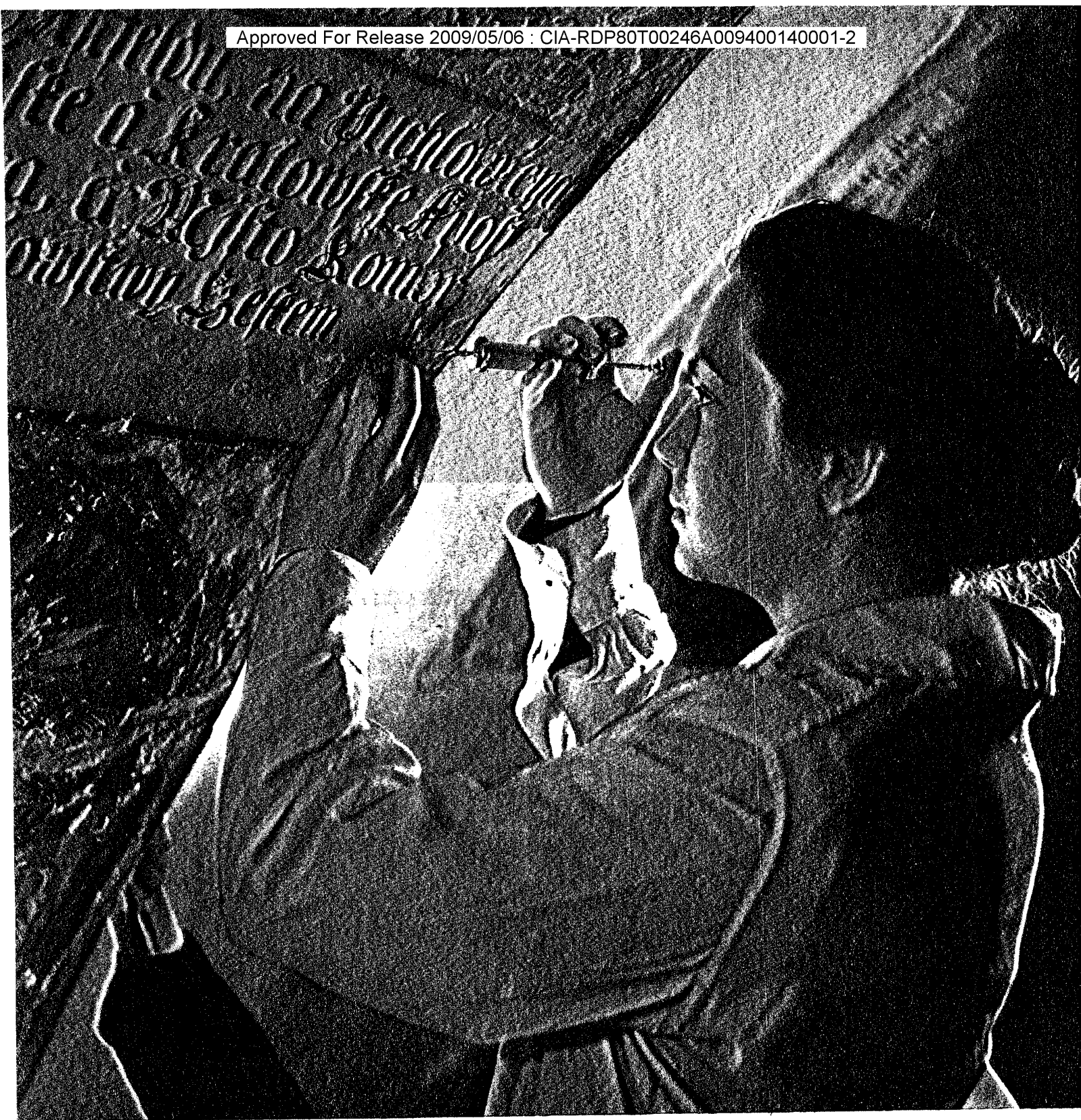


Where stone and bronze beauties meet

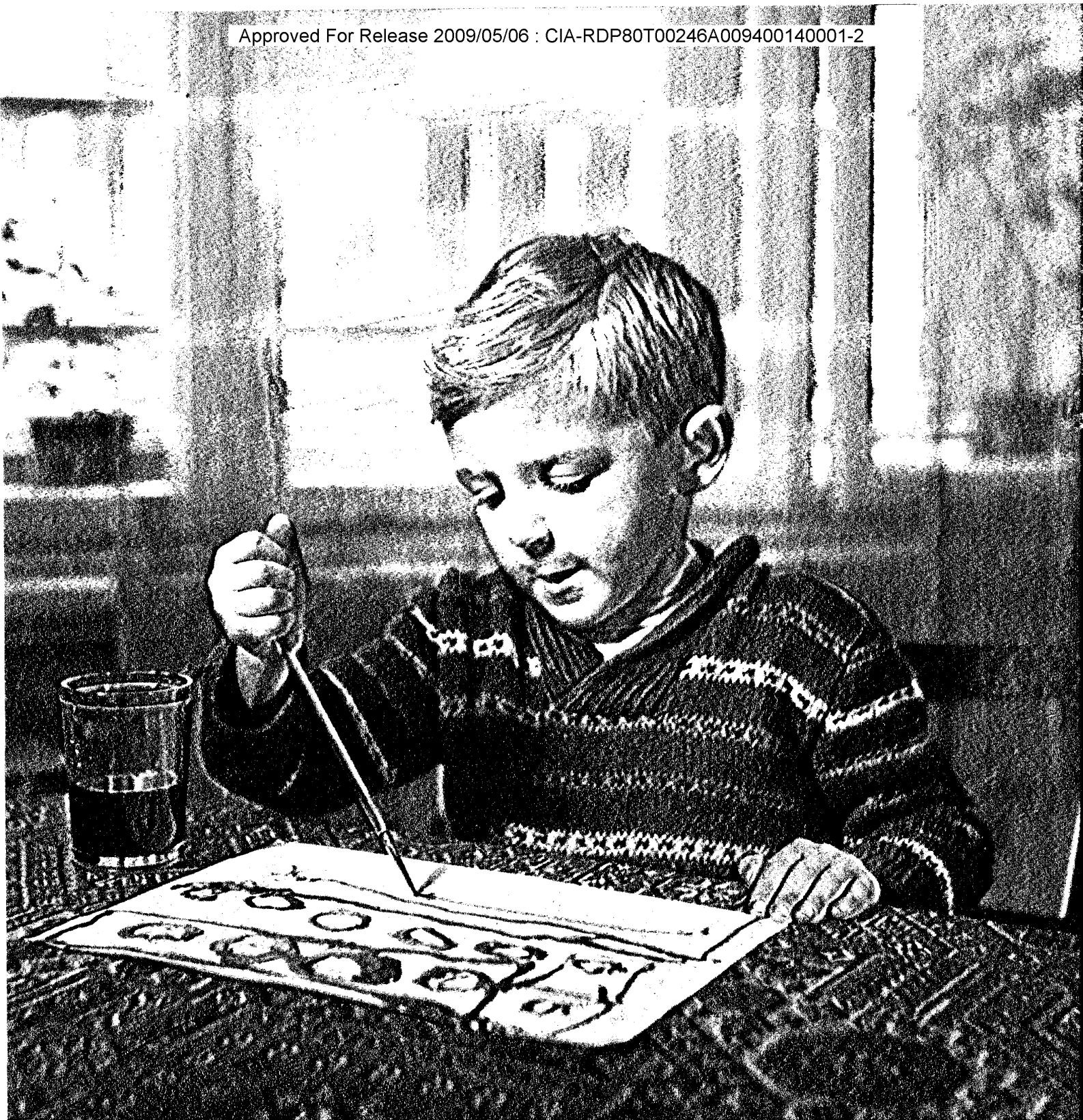








For future ages

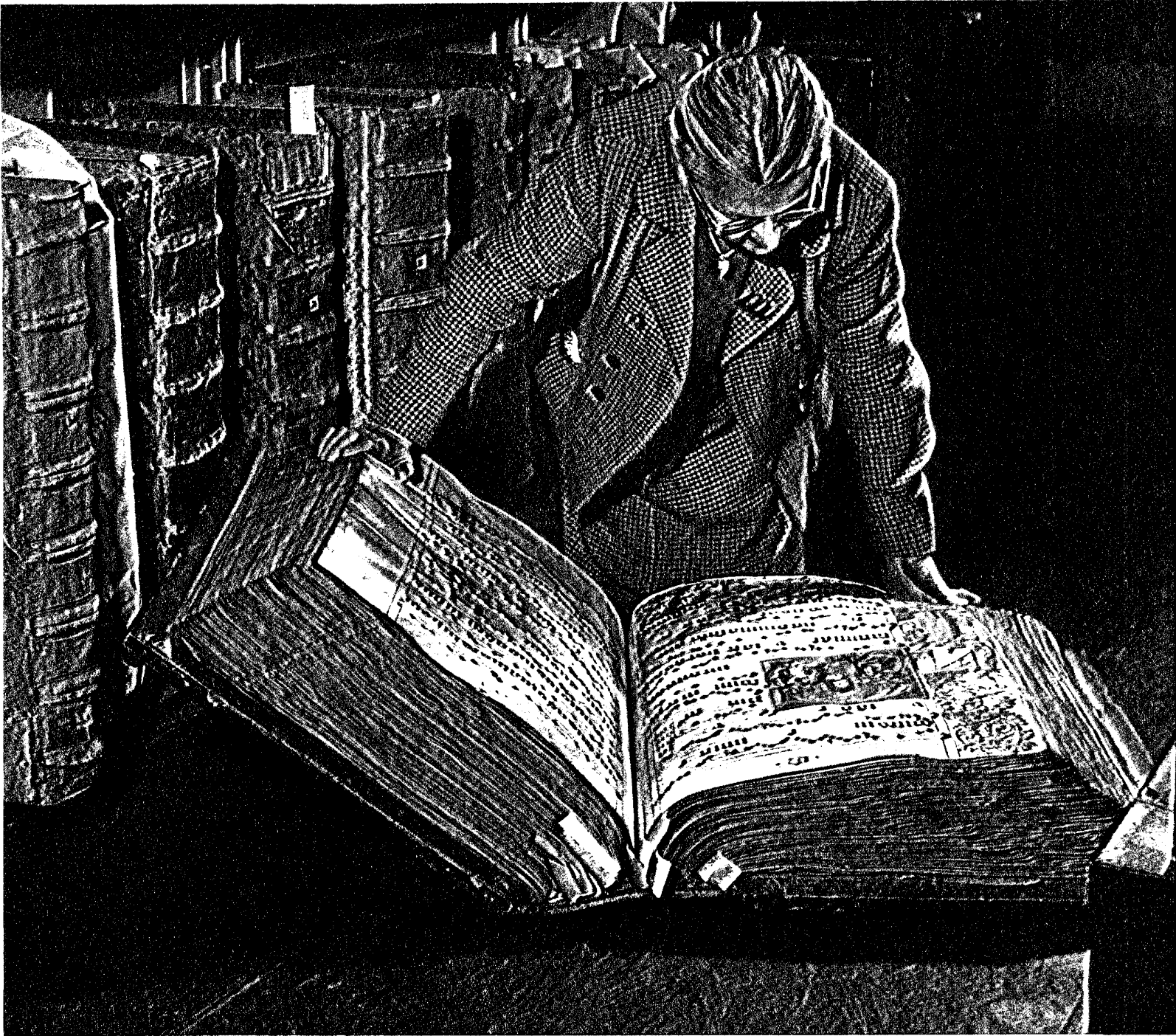




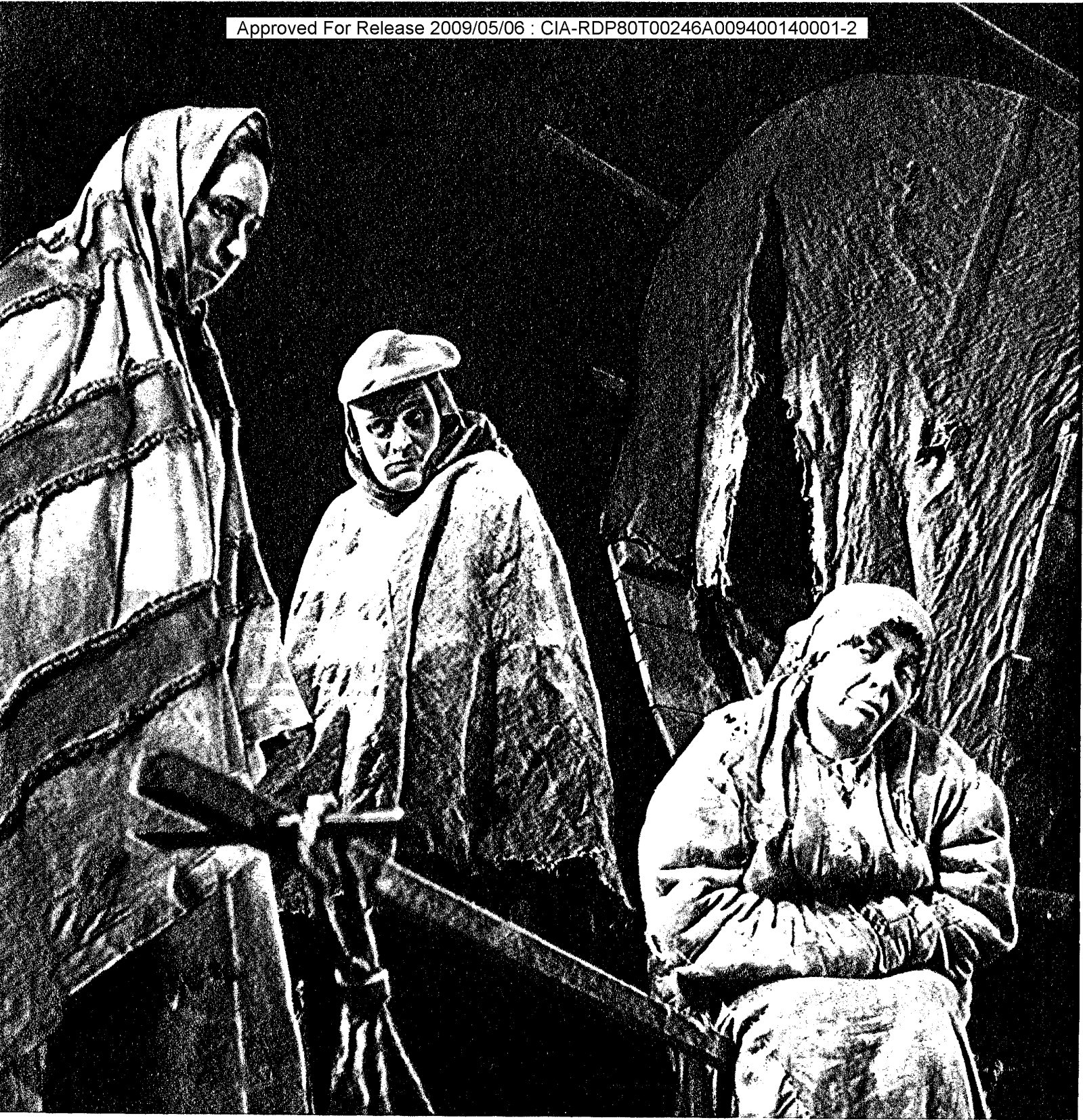
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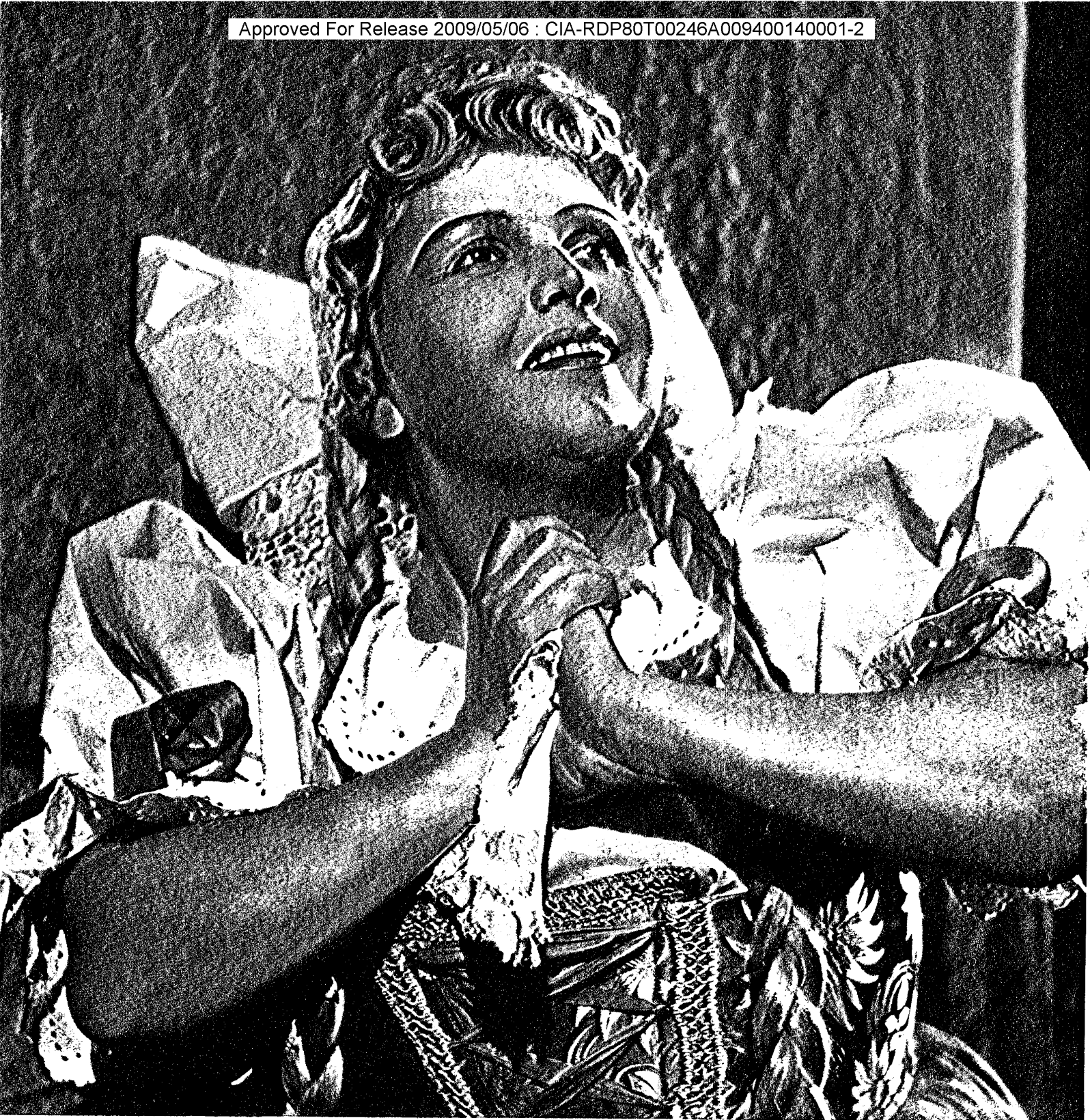
A book which exacts homage



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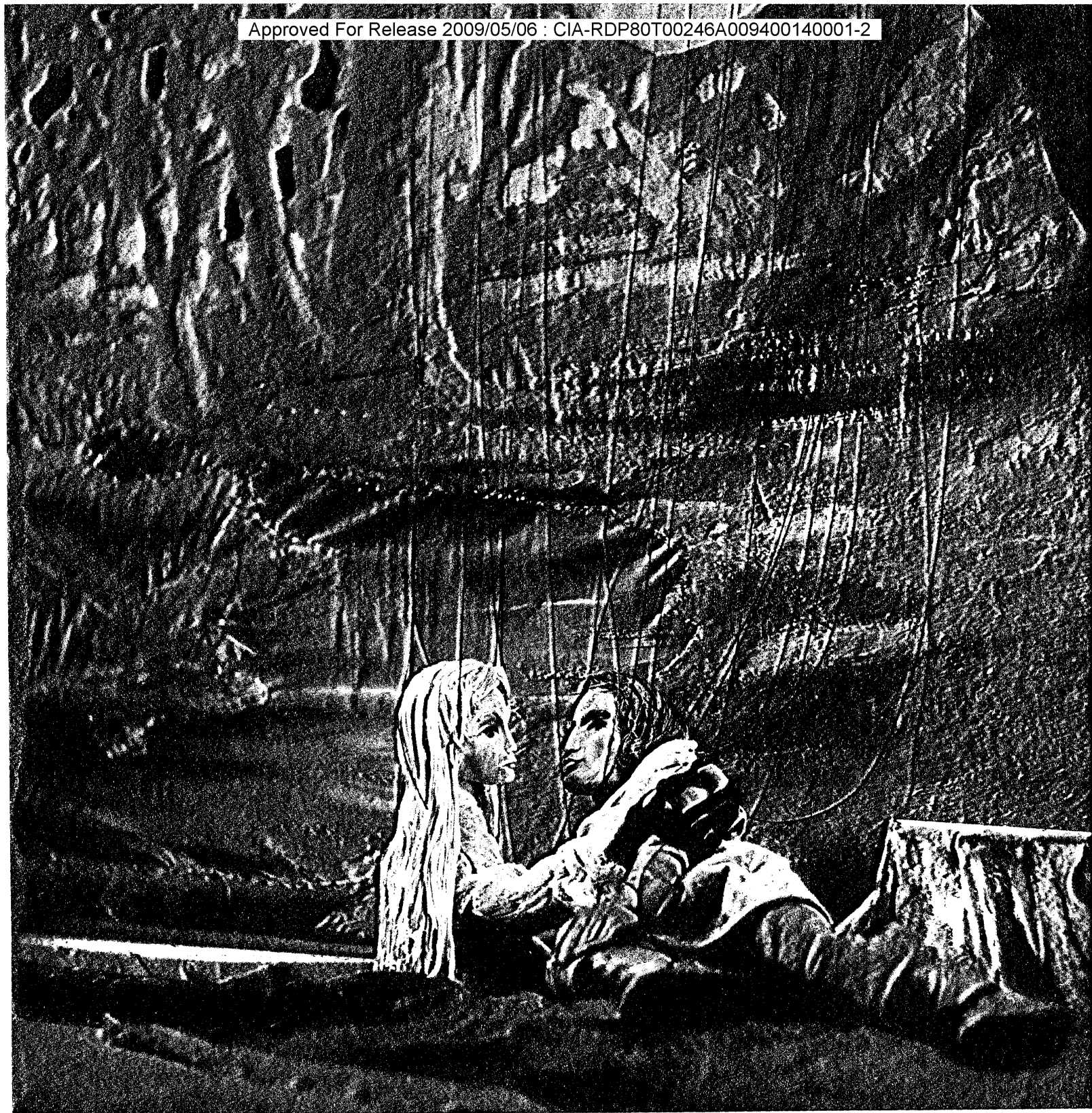
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Conversation in gesture

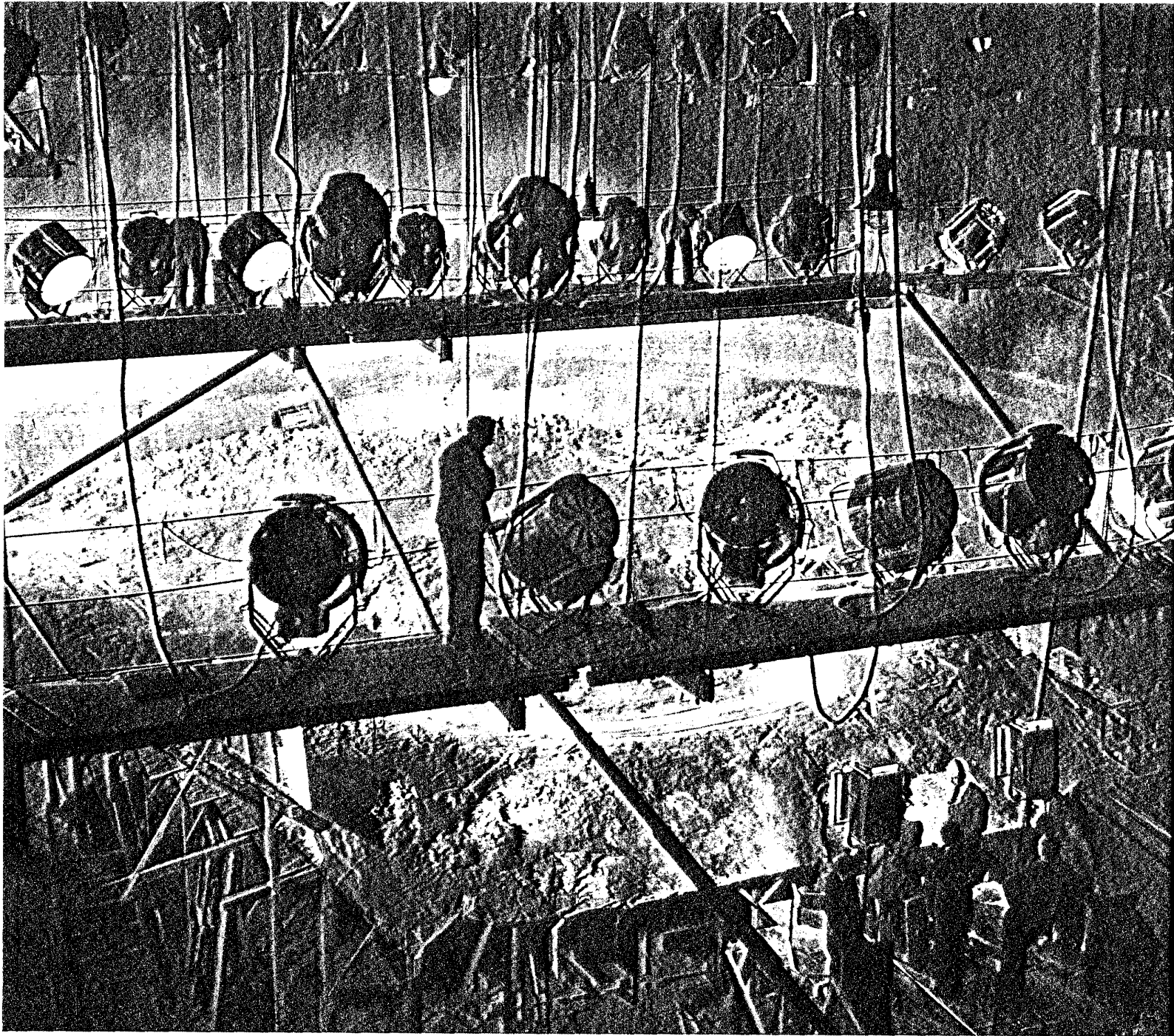


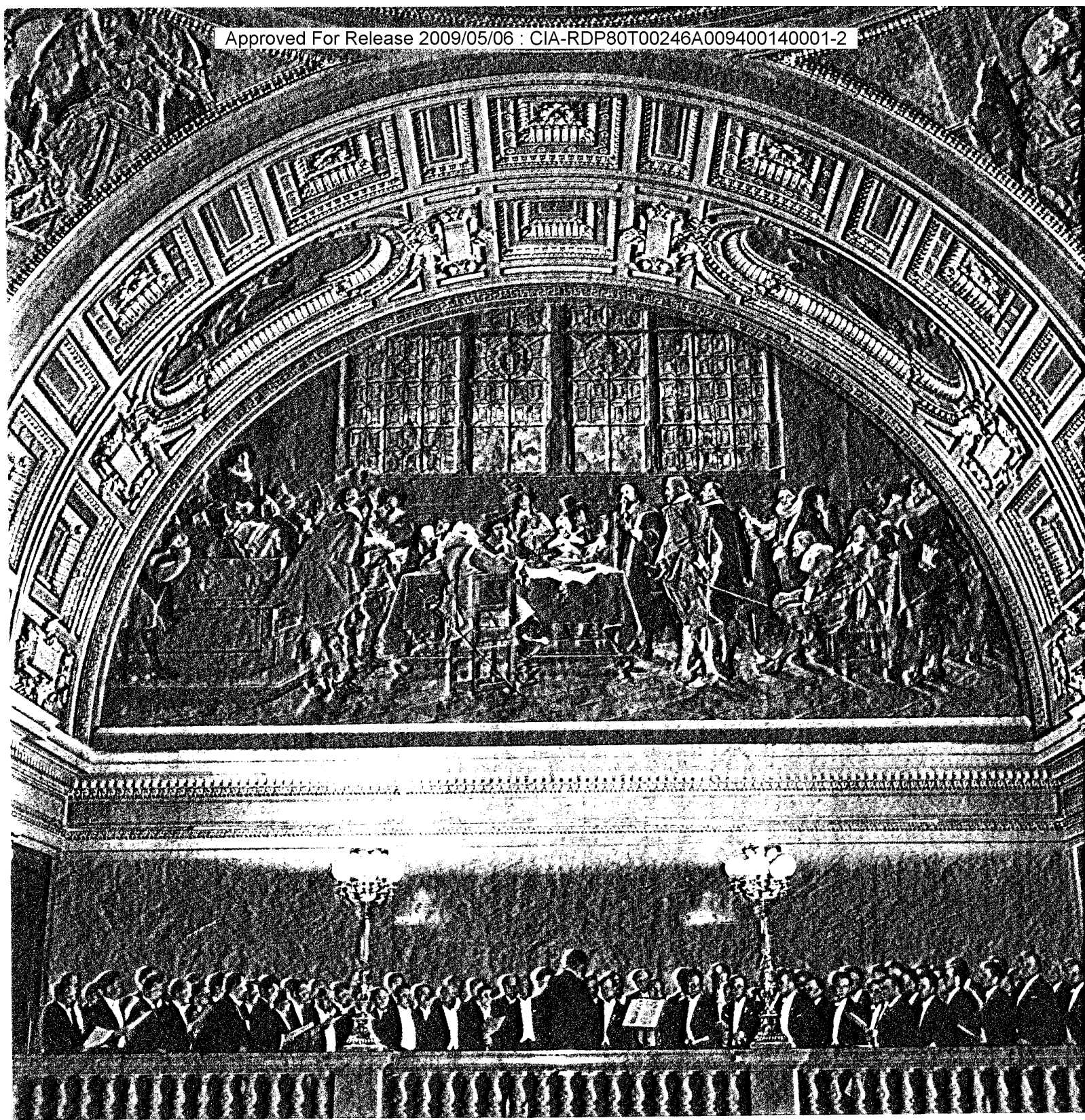


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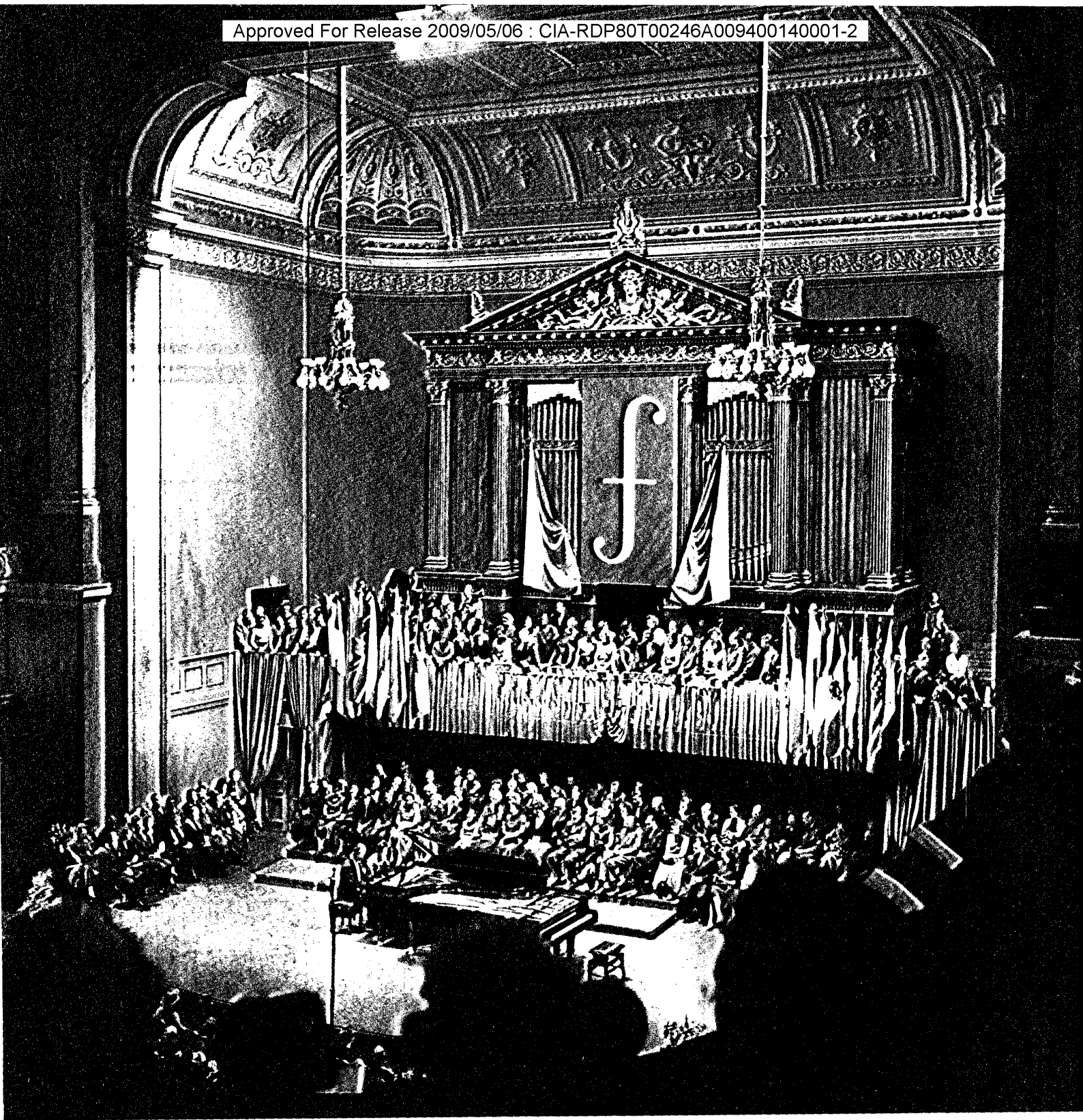




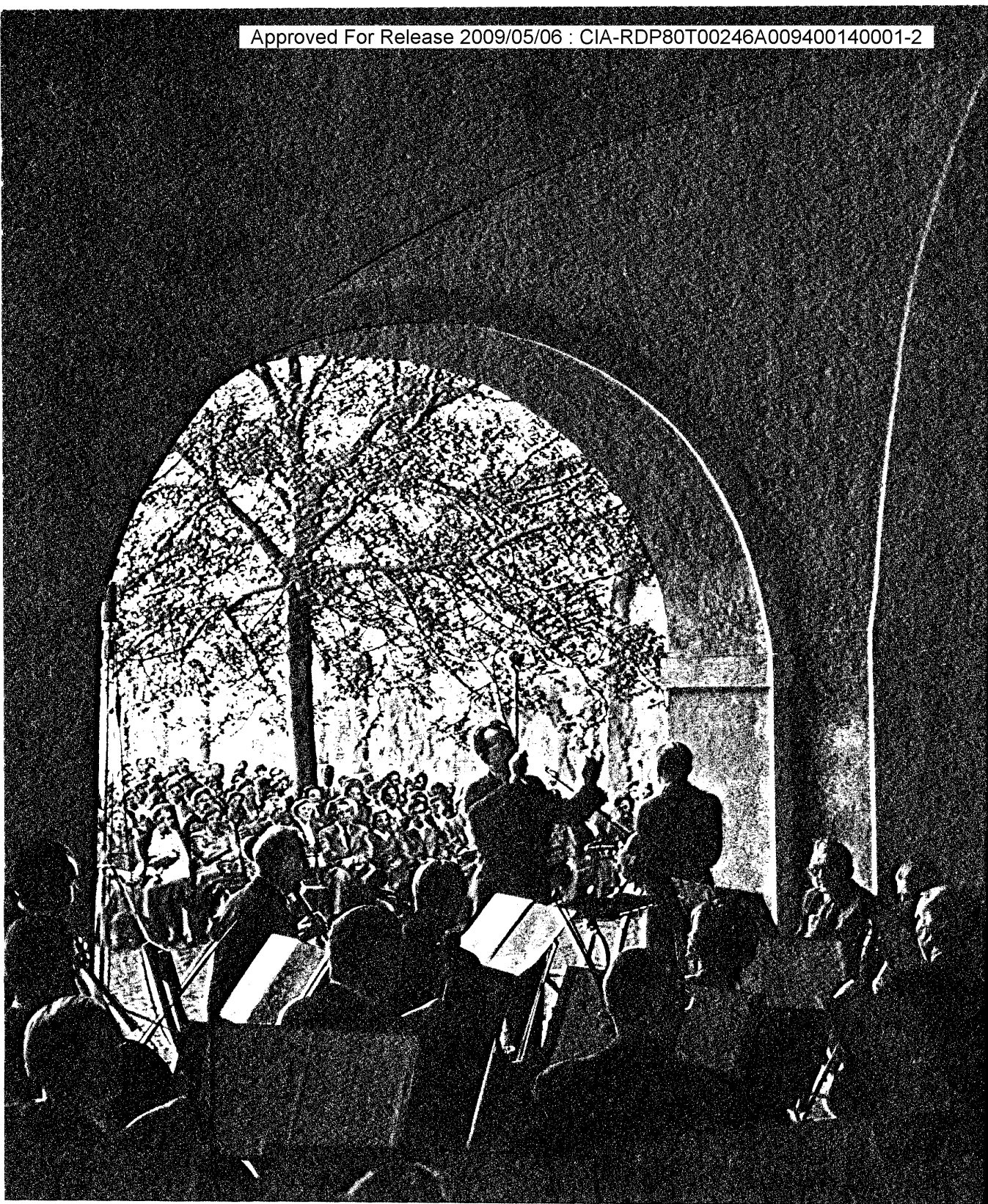


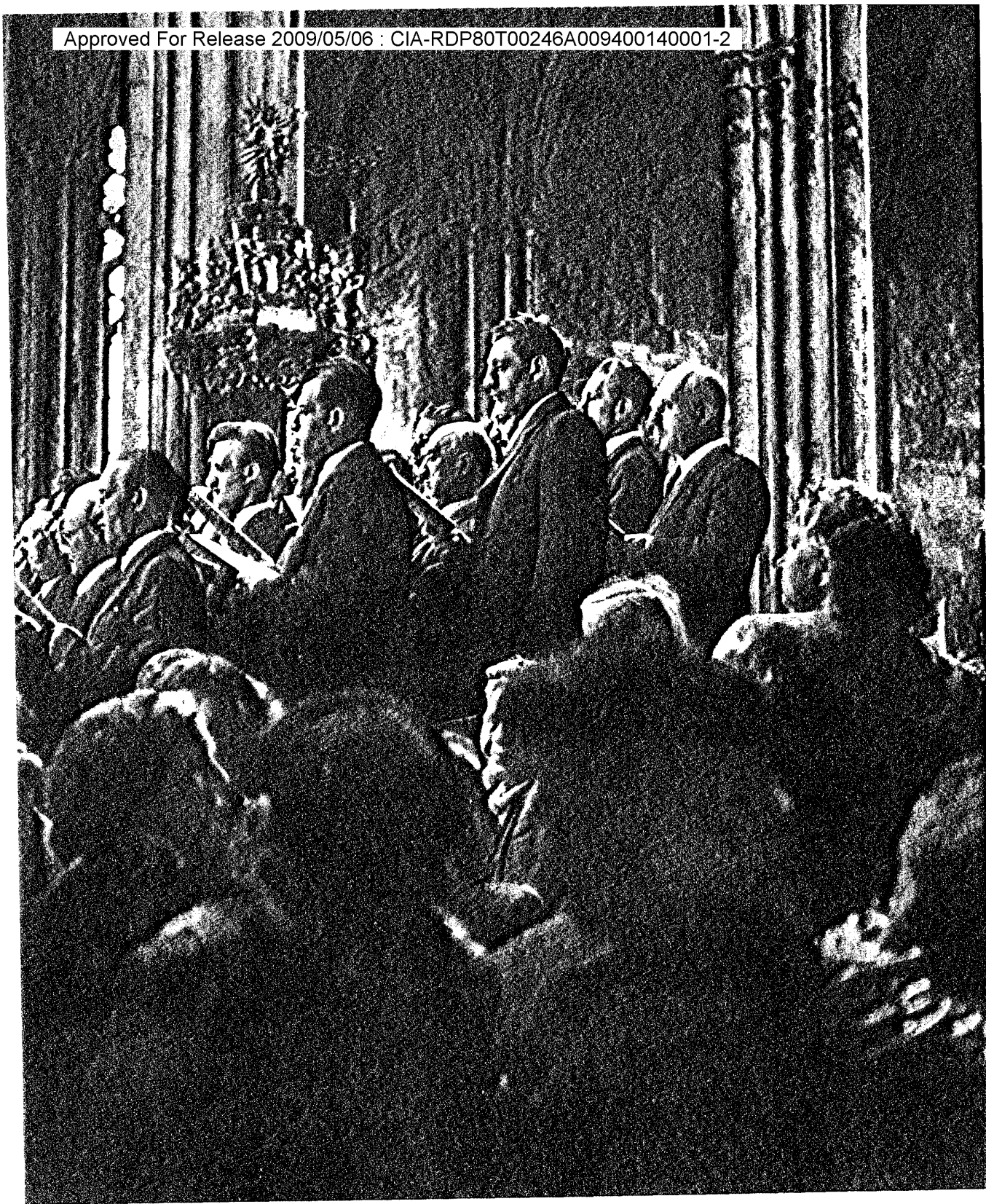
Two gatherings



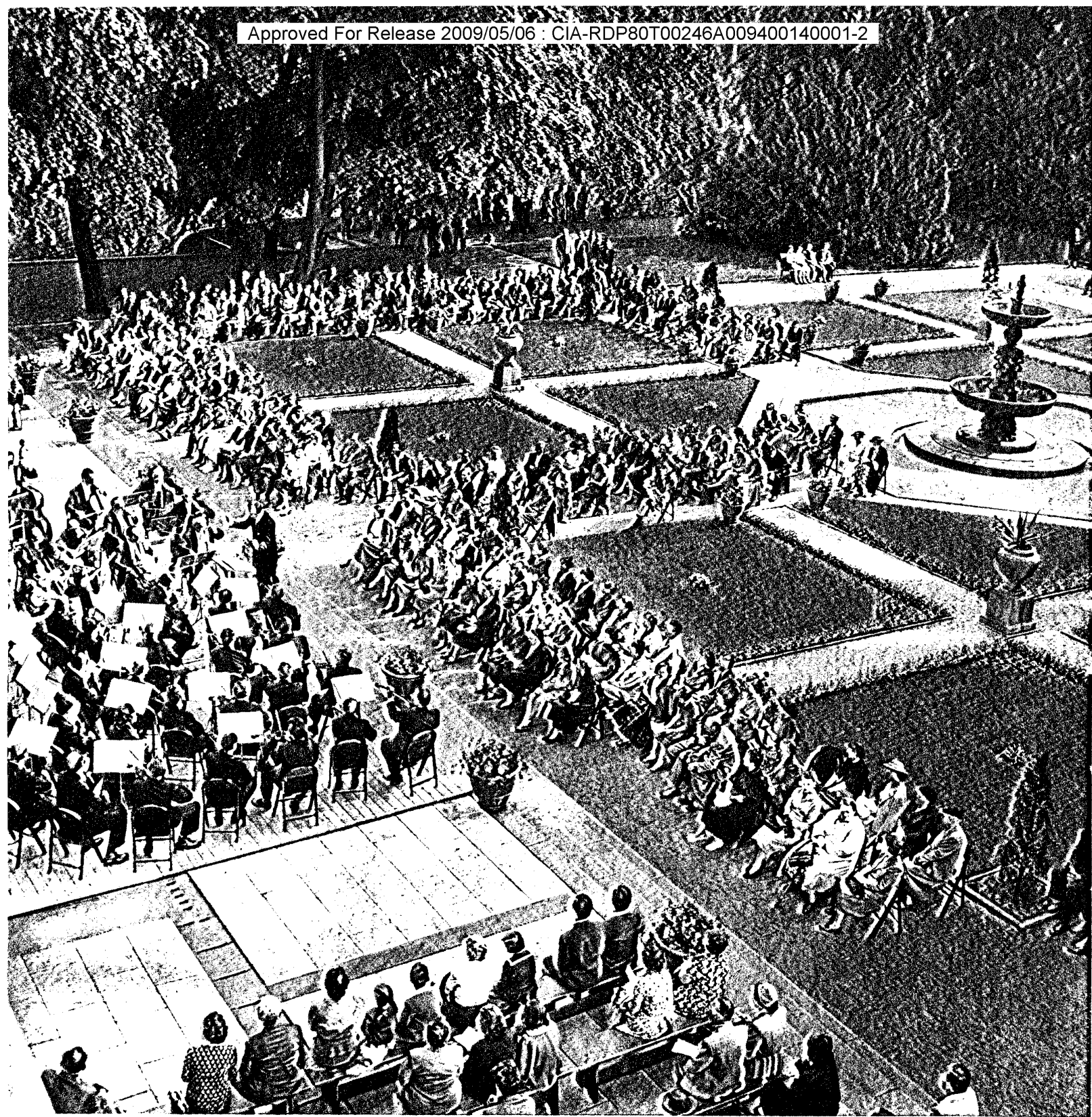


Sold out

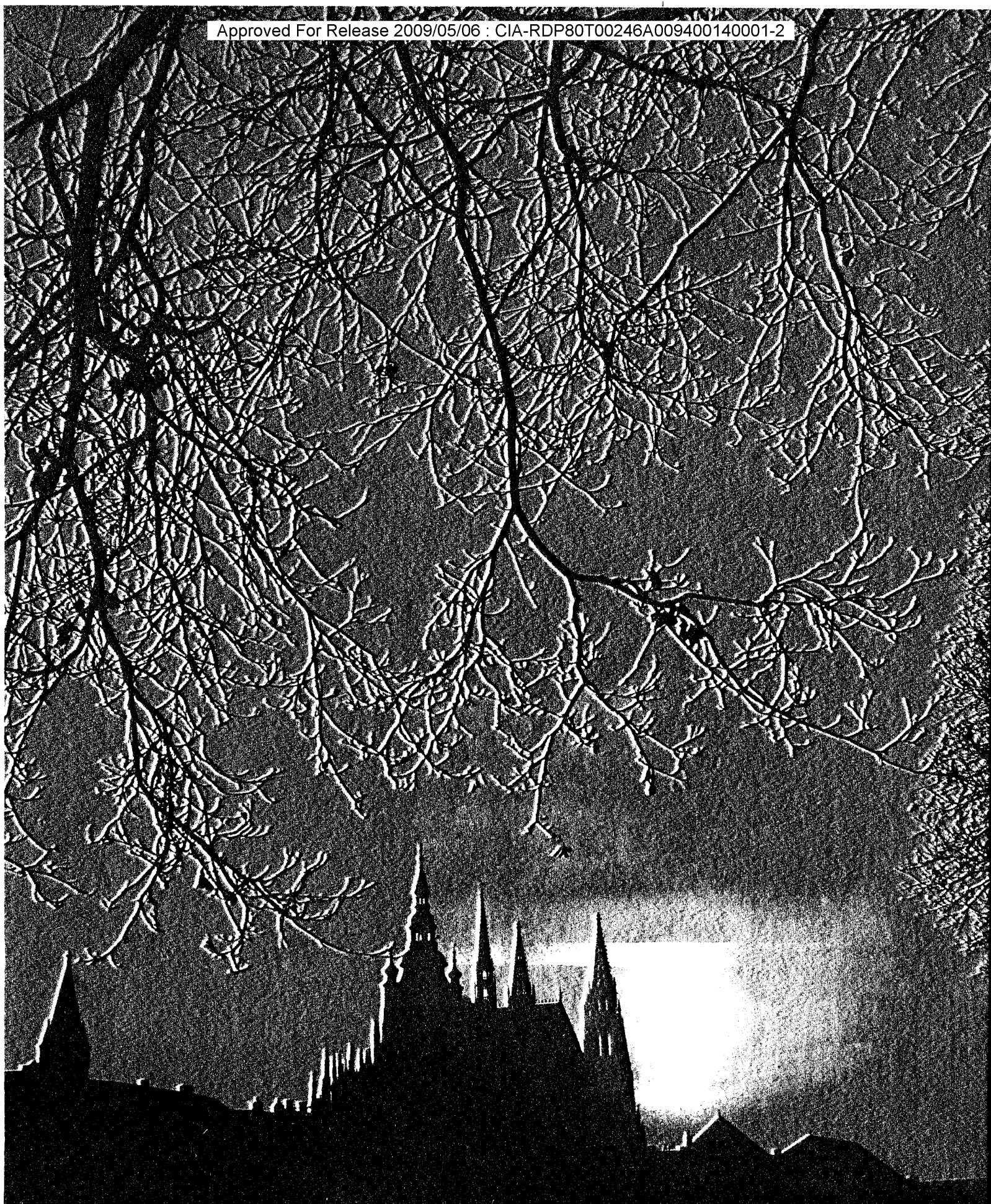




Concert in the cathedral



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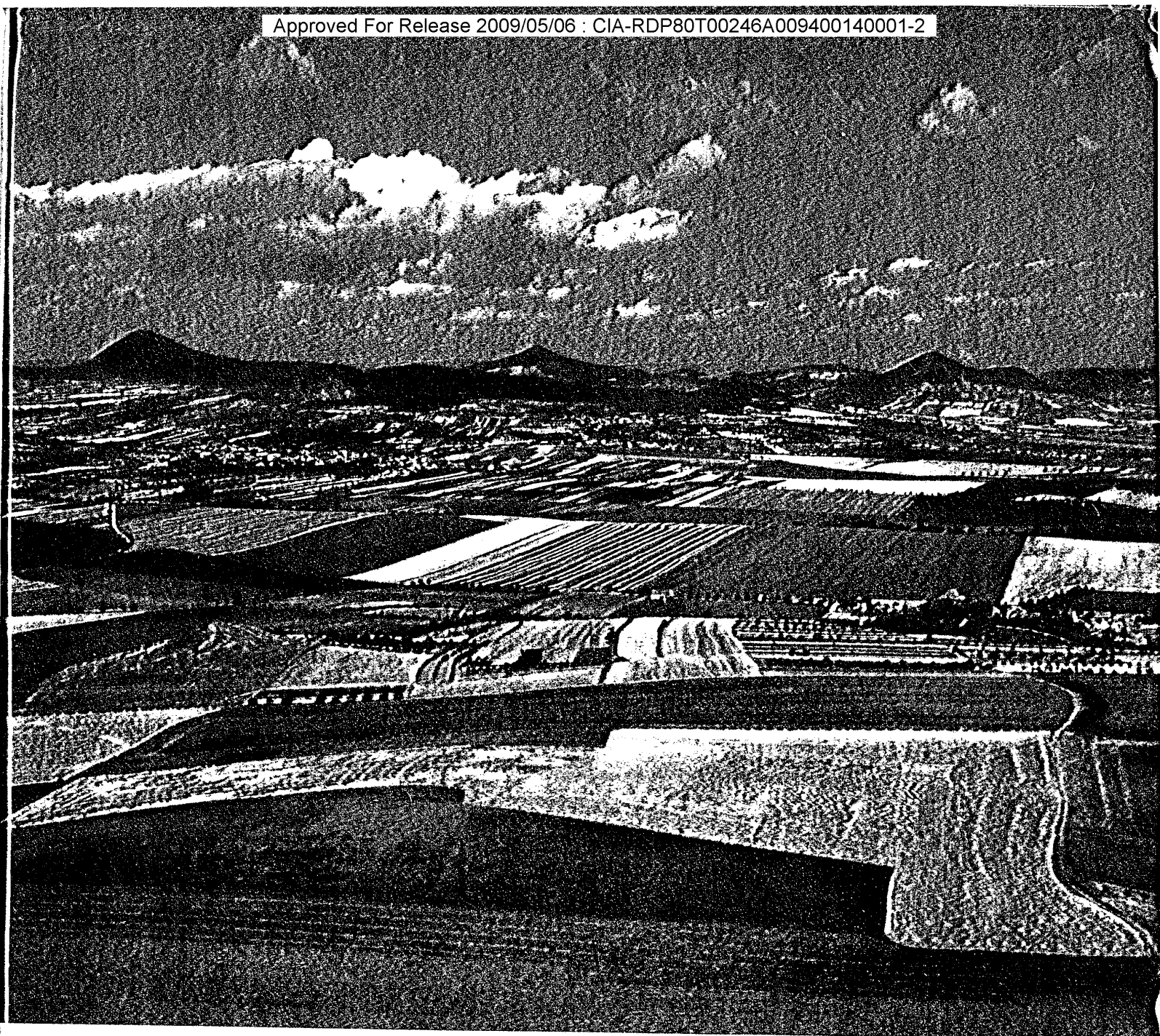
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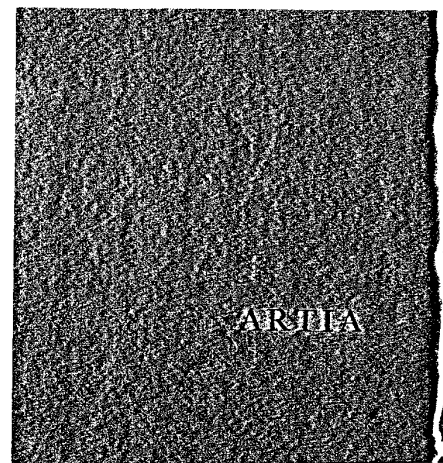
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THE FACE OF A COUNTRY



ARTIA